

# BUSINESS PROFILE

## Kumon Center Of Howell

### *Helping Children Master the Skills They Need to Succeed in School...and Life*

By Glen Beres

For more than a decade, the Kumon Center of Howell has been helping area children excel in math and reading. The Howell Center, run by Director and long-time Howell resident Connie Schmidt Kirman, has more than 200 students from preschool to high school age enrolled in individualized, self-paced instruction.

The Howell Center, which recently moved to 4554 Route 9 South in the Friendship Plaza Shopping Center, is part of an international company with more than 26,000 learning center franchises in 46 countries teaching after-school education to over 4 million students worldwide.

Schmidt Kirman had her own two children enrolled in the program before deciding to become a franchisee, and saw first-hand the difference it made in their education.

According to Schmidt Kirman, the Kumon system is a very efficient way for children to learn, both for remedial and enrichment instruction. She views Kumon as a complement to a child's school education, where along with teaching them strong reading and math skills, she focuses on instructing them in areas they may not have grasped in school – such as how to study and how to take tests.

The Kumon program is rigorous yet rewarding for students. It re-

ready, so we take them back, and within a year, they are not only caught up, but they have become model students. Many even become honor students."

As for students in the enrichment program, Schmidt Kirman said most of them are working a bit ahead of their grade level. When a child has reached the point of working six months ahead of their grade level, they achieve Honor Roll status and get their name published in the Kumon newspaper.

While Schmidt Kirman has many success stories about how the program has helped her students, one that stood out in her mind involved a younger child who was struggling with reading. "This student was having a tough time putting words together and spent a lot of time on the lower levels," she recalled. "Then, everything just clicked. It was very fulfilling to see."

As the driving force behind the Kumon Center of Howell, Schmidt Kirman wears many hats – including student instruction, business operations, Web site maintenance, promotion and community outreach. She acknowledged that the first few years of running the franchise for her and her small part-time staff were challenging, especially the all-encompassing time and effort required to make the program a success. However, Schmidt Kirman has found support in the Kumon Franchise Association, where she has gotten tips on how to improve her business model and exchanged ideas with other franchisees. She also has enjoyed visiting other centers in the tri-state area and even as far as Canada to see what they are doing and bring back ideas she can implement at her own center.

One of Schmidt Kirman's most successful marketing ideas for her program has been the "Kumon Car." For Howell residents, Schmidt Kirman's flashy yellow VW Beetle sporting the distinctive Kumon logo, advertising message and contact information across its hood, doors and rear has been a familiar sight around town the last few years. The car even participated in this year's local Memorial Day Parade.

As an educator with a passion for helping students learn the study skills that will enable them to work on their own and take responsibility for themselves, Schmidt Kirman seemed destined to become involved



Kumon's core goal is to help children develop the ability to think, learn and concentrate. The program also is designed to encourage a child's independence, perseverance and self-confidence. Schmidt Kirman said this focus on developing a child's critical thinking skills as well as inspiring a love of learning is one of the main things that attracted her to Kumon. Another factor was that Kumon is considered the world's largest and most successful after-school educational company, and Schmidt Kirman liked the fact that Kumon is continually striving to improve its program. A third factor is that

quires them to spend about 20 to 30 minutes on homework seven days a week. Schmidt Kirman noted that children who really flourish under the program are those who receive strong support and commitment from their parents. Many have been with the program for years, progressing from basic numeric skills all the way up to calculus.

For students in a remedial program, the goal is to "get them caught up" to their grade level and eventually working beyond it. "We have had great success with remedial kids," Schmidt Kirman noted. "They often get pushed ahead before they are

with Kumon. She graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree from The College of New Jersey School of Business, and earned a Masters in Business Administration from Monmouth University with honors. After working in graduate education at both The College of New Jersey and Lehigh University, Schmidt Kirman became a fully licensed Kumon instructor and took over the Howell Center.

Schmidt Kirman also is active in the community. She volunteers her time to the Howell Alliance, the Howell Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation and the Literacy Volunteers of Monmouth County. She also

is certified to volunteer tutor adult basic literacy and English as Second Language (ESL) students. Schmidt Kirman's center also has sponsored free movies and roundtable discussions on education at the Howell Library.

One of Schmidt Kirman's goals is to start a conversation at all levels in the community about the state of education in this country and what needs to be done to improve it. In particular, she hopes to see more support, understanding and a sense of collaboration from the school system.

"I've talked with teachers who feel that if a child needs Kumon, they're not doing their job,"

Schmidt Kirman said. "But that's not what we do. We complement what they do. In today's world, our kids need stronger skills to compete, and we're raising the bar to help them."

For more information on the Kumon Center of Howell, please contact Connie Schmidt Kirman, director, at 732-889-4385 or by e-mail at [kumonhowellnj@gmail.com](mailto:kumonhowellnj@gmail.com). You can also visit the Web site at [www.kumonhowellnj.com](http://www.kumonhowellnj.com). The Kumon Center of Howell is located at 4554 Route 9 South in the Friendship Plaza Shopping Center. Class hours are Monday and Thursday, 3 to 7 p.m., and Saturday, 9 to 10:30 a.m. Parent orientations and placement tests are by appointment only.



The "Kumon Car" participated in Howell's Memorial Day Parade this year.