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Real Estate

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BIG DEAL

Selling Condos? It's Child's Play

THE McDonald's Happy Meal, which upended fast-food dining when it was first rolled out nationally in 1979, was a brilliantly simple concept: add a toy with some marketing tie-in to a colorful box with a burger, fries, a soft drink and cookies, and make children harass their parents until they steered for the double arches.

"My feeling was if you get the children to think about McDonald's, Mom would bring them there," Bob Bernstein, the advertising executive who invented the Happy Meal, said in a 2004 interview.

That marketing strategy now seems to be taking root in high-end Manhattan real estate.

Consider the Aldyn, a luxury condominium build-

ing at 60 Riverside Boulevard in Manhattan. It has 40,000 square feet of amenity space, including a full-size basketball court, a two-lane bowling alley, a golf simulator, a gym, a billiards table, a Ping-Pong table and a sort of community cafe. Oh, and there's a two-floor rock-climbing wall.

"This is what I call my closer," said Larry Krusman, the building's director of sales. "After you sell them on the apartment, I take them here."

Show me a kid who would not want to live there.

That seems to be the point, and it's part of a marketing strategy that some developers are employing to try to keep Manhattan families from leaving the

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SPARE TIME The bowling alley inside the Aldyn on the Upper West Side.

Selling Condos? It's Child's Play



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FLEX TIME Leo Scher and Maya Sloan with Leo's nanny, Annie Manners, at the Rushmore.

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city — or to lure them back after they escaped to the suburbs in search of more space for their kids to play.

If you indulge your children, the theory goes, that will add peace and harmony to the stresses of living a normally cramped Manhattan life.

Mr. Kruysman has seen this movie before, in his previous incarnation working in the super-market business. "You always put the sweetened cereals along the bottom shelf because that's what the kids see," he said. "There is a science to shelf placement."

While the Aldyn is catering to the "tween" market, other developers have contracted with companies like Kidville and Jodi's Gym to install modern playrooms for the infant-to-5 set and create social hubs for their parents.

"Over the years, more now than ever, we are seeing more families choose to stay in New York and raise their families in New York," said Kelly Mack, the president of Corcoran Sunshine Marketing Group, "and a lot of these people are having more kids than they did before. You start to make plans to accommodate those people."

In the past three years, about 20 percent of condominium sales in Manhattan were for residences with three or more bedrooms, up from about 15 percent in 2003, Ms. Mack said. The average size of a new development residence is 1,330 square feet, about 5 percent larger than in 2007, she added.

The Extell Development Company built more kid-friendly amenities in a handful of buildings in the city, especially along Riverside Boulevard in the lower 60s, which has become a family-friendly area of the Upper West Side dubbed Riverside South.

Brokers boast that it is just 10 minutes from Lincoln Center, but

you feel sort of isolated over there, with the nearby elevated highway adding a soundtrack. Still, there are soccer and baseball fields across from the buildings and a park under development.

"This is as close as you get to living in a suburb while still living in the city," said Alma Sloan, 34, who lives with her husband and two children in a three-bedroom apartment at the Rushmore, next door to the Aldyn.

The majority of the apartments at the Aldyn and the Rushmore have two bedrooms or more. At the Aldyn, prices range from about \$1.5 million, for a two-bedroom, to about \$15 million for a six-bedroom duplex. Two duplexes for sale have 15-by-37.5-foot swimming pools. The developer started selling apartments in January 2011, and 70 percent of the residences at the Aldyn are under contract.

At the Rushmore, two-bedroom apartments are listed at \$1.2 million, with four-bedrooms running \$3.58 million.

Regardless of square footage, "you can always sell the kids on the place," Mr. Kruysman said. "You get these whiny little guys pushing their parents: 'This is where I want to live. I want to use that basketball court. I want to go bowling every day.'"

The bowling alley has been the Aldyn's most popular amenity, and the basketball court has been used for volleyball, soccer, birthday parties and a Halloween dance. On Tuesdays there is a "serious" basketball game for adults that has "been known to get a little bloody," he said. The upscale gym operator La Palesstra is managing the amenity spaces for Extell.

Donna Gargano, the senior vice president for development at Extell, says the company took advantage of the building's large footprint to create the enormous amenity spaces at the Aldyn.

The lot along the river gave the

developer 100,000 square feet of underground space on two levels. Using all of that for a parking garage might have been a waste. So the developer decided to build a space that could be shared among the Aldyn; the neighboring Ashley, a rental property; and a third building yet to be constructed — about 750 residences in total.

Next door at the Rushmore, parents coo over their padded-wall playroom designed by Kidville, a company started by the founders of the restaurant chain Cosi. The playroom is open 24 hours a day, and families in the building get a Kidville Platinum membership (the company has 22 locations in the United States, and in far-flung locales like Mumbai and Dubai).

"The playroom is the reason we moved in here," said Julie Scher, 34. "It provides sanity, and makes living in the city easier."

After moving into a three-bedroom at the Rushmore, she and her husband, David, a lawyer, recently decided to trade up to a four-bedroom rather than move to the suburbs.

While her son Leo, 21 months, lets off steam building forts and playing with the rubber toys, she has become fast friends with Ms. Sloan, who watches over her 21-month-old daughter Maya.

"My son fell in love with Maya here," Ms. Scher said. "They have a really hot-and-heavy romance going."

I asked Rammy Harwood, the president of Kidville, if sophisticated playrooms and other child-friendly amenities were drawing families to high-priced buildings in much the same way that Happy Meals have worked magic for McDonald's for more than three decades.

"I respect the analogy from a sheer growth standpoint," he said, smiling. But "this is a little healthier."