

## HOMETOWN

# Children make Redwood City native sing

'Andy Z' switches from tech to teaching and loves work

By KATHY SCHRENK  
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REDWOOD CITY — As with many people contemplating a career change, it took the jolt of a pink slip to put Andy Zamenes on a new path.

Zamenes had been moonlighting as a guitarist in a band called Tinmen when his tech support job vanished two years ago. With time on his hands, he was soon singing and playing songs like "Hide Your Love Away" and "Losing My Religion" in coffee houses and at farmers' markets.

It was not until later that the Redwood City native has discovered that his true calling comes in singing songs like "I Went 2 A Party With Dinosaurs" and "Boo Boo Song."

Zamenes was playing at farmers' markets when he noticed it was little kids who really responded to his music, stopping their parents so they could listen to him.

"I really connected with kids," he said. "They feel comfortable around me right away, which is pretty cool."

It was also something of a surprise.

Zamenes does not yet have kids of his own, though he would like to some day. He has been visiting Peninsula day-care centers and schools to entertain and educate with his voice and guitar for about a year now.

"Sometimes I feel like I have a couple hundred kids," he said.

It is hard to know who benefits more from those visits — Zamenes (billed as Andy Z) or the kids.

Zamenes has released a recording of his songs called "Pockets" and he said much of the inspiration for the songs comes from kids. "A kid went up to me one day and said, 'Look Teacher Andy, I have pockets,' and he dug his hands as deep as he could and it was the coolest thing in the world," Zamenes said.

Those interactions, the glimpses of childhood wonder, are what he loves about working with kids.

"Playing for kids reminds you of your childhood," he said. "You wake up your inner child, which seems really New-Age and trite but it's really true."

Zamenes clearly has a knack for working with children, said Leah Tamayo, director of Playschool Redwood City, where he works with kids

aged 2 through 5. "The minute he walks in the door everybody drops what they're doing and comes and sits on the rug for story time," she said.

Zamenes plays for half an hour, with the roughly 30 kids often singing along, Tamayo said. He also leads the kids in some exercises where they themselves play instruments like maracas and triangles, she said.

"He's really talented," Tamayo said. "He has a great rapport with the children. It's almost like a concert when he comes."

Andy Z will be performing a number of times locally in the near future:

- 11 a.m. today Talbot's Toyland, 445 South B St., San Mateo.
- 11:30 a.m. May 17, Learning Express 850 Emmett Ave., Belmont.
- 9:30 a.m. to noon May 18, Menlo Park Farmers' Market, between Santa Cruz and Menlo avenues, downtown.
- 11:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. June 7, the Andy Z Three at Art in the Park, Washington Park in Burlingame.

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Andy Zamenes says playing music for kids keeps him young.

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