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ENTREPRENEUR

Evolutionary Road

A local toy company puts Charlie Darwin into play.

You can't accuse Kate Miller of thinking small.

The Rhode Island scientist and mom took on 600 million years of history to create her Pawtucket-based company, Charlie's Playhouse, which makes evolution-themed toys for kids. Her signature product is a giant timeline that lets kids skip through eons of the earth's craziest critters, such as the 500-million-year-old *Hallucigenia*, a headless bundle of spikes, and a Triassic-period *Tanystropheus* with a neck twice as long as its body.

Miller's own two sons inspired her entrepreneurial adventure. When dinosaur mania hit her household some years back, she was surprised after she shopped around for evolution-themed science toys and came up empty-handed. She found many centered on chemistry, astronomy, physics and biology, but evolution, she concluded, was too politicized for the toy industry. "It was like a sound you don't notice until it stops," Miller says, "I'd stumbled on this unwillingness to engage children with these fundamental and fascinating concepts."

Mom to the rescue. Within two years, Miller launched her company, which now offers the giant timeline, wall posters, card

games, T-shirts and more, all with a focus on evolution and made with nontoxic, sustainable materials. The products have racked up several awards (including "Best Green Product of 2009" from the children's play expert Dr. Toy), and her timeline and creature cards are being used to develop a national evolution-based science curriculum. Call it reproductive success.

For products and info, visit charliesplayhouse.com - LESLEY RIVA

