

Go for the 'gold'

The gold certificate will be the new gift of choice for smart holiday shoppers this year, according to retailing executives at some of metropolitan Detroit's biggest shopping centers.

The gold certificate is the most widely-accepted gift certificate ever issued. It buys merchandise and services in every one of over 800 businesses in four of the area's largest shopping centers: Briarwood in Ann Arbor, Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn, Lakeside in Sterling Heights, and Twelve Oaks in Novi.

"Unlike most gift certificates, which are good for a single store or for one center, the gold certificate offers an unlimited choice of merchandise and services in four shopping centers," explained Larry Hunt, regional director for the Taubman Co., which manages the four retail centers. "That includes all of the department stores, the movies, restaurants, pet shops, beauty shops — even the dental offices."

Gold certificates in any denomination can be purchased at the information desks at all four centers.

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Investigate before picking out toys

IF YOU'RE like millions of other shoppers, walking into a toy store at Christmas time may be overwhelming. Suddenly, you're confronted by an array of colors, sizes and shapes that seem as endless as the aisles you walk down. Traditional playthings are side by side with newfangled, high-tech toys.

But toys are an important part of the giving season, and even if you don't have little ones of your own, holiday time in the world of toys can awaken you to the glee and happiness of Christmas.

Parents usually know exactly what their little ones want for Christmas, but if you're choosing a gift for the child of an employer, neighbor or relative, the following recommendations from L.J.N. Toys Ltd., might help.

GET SUGGESTIONS from friends who are parents. If you haven't shopped for toys for a while, you might

be in for a surprise when you see the diversity of products on the market.

One suggestion is to find out what the popular TV shows are among kids and check to see if toy collections are available based on the series. Anything a child can easily relate to — a TV or storybook hero — will likely contribute to imaginative play and creativity.

Select toys that feel good. "All children like cuddly dolls — a doll that feels good to hold is important to the child's development," said Janice Gibson, chairman of the department of psychology and education at the University of Pittsburgh. "Children are attached to toys that feel good to explore both visually and through touch."

Consider the age of the child. As children develop, their toy preferences change. A toddler needs toys that stimulate imitative play.

During the middle school years, children enjoy team play and become concerned with winning. Group play during the ages of 8-12, according to child care experts, teaches children about the nature of competition, which often helps to stimulate cognitive growth.

A game like Photon, a high-tech version of "Cowboys and Indians" that is played in teams, can help children learn about group strategy, ingenuity and team participating.

SELECT TOYS THAT stimulate the imagination. "Playing with figures that have 'human' characteristics can help a child construct new fantasies and understand their own unique feelings and ideas," Gibson said. "Children are more easily apt to identify with such characters and creatively work out conflicts through imaginative play."

Know the child's preferences. Find out from a parent, babysitter or neighbor what the child's interests are. For instance: Is the child artistic? Does he or she enjoy independent or group play?

Children have the same likes and dislikes as adults, so it's important to learn what you can about the child as a "person."

Consider toys that are active. In addition to intellectual and emotional development, children need to develop and strengthen their bodies. Whether it be the development of small muscles in the hands and fingers or improving and perfecting eye/hand coordination, many toys are active in nature and

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