

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

MONDAY, Dec. 23, 1996

SHOPPING CENTERED



PHOTO BY JERRY ZIMMERMAN

Eye-to-eye: Rebekah Malover, 4, tells Santa her Christmas wishes at Twelve Mall, Southfield.

Santa never forgets a face... or a wish

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

When my editor asked me to "find out what kids are really asking for this Christmas," I decided to go right to the source. I began searching for Santa Claus, aware he'd be making his rounds at all of the malls around town.

It had been years since we talked. As I entered the Livonia Mall, I worried. What if Santa had forgotten who I was?

"Forget you Lin?" he looked disappointed. "I've known you since you were two."

He gave me permission to stand out-of-sight, listening to the little boys and girls about to visit. I promised to be as quiet as a mouse.

Most of the requests were for Buzz Lightyear, Doodle Bear, and Barbie.

"If I get asked for a puppy, I simply say I'm afraid an animal might jump out my sleigh," said the sly old gent with a wink.

I breathed a sigh of relief. I was sure glad that new policy wasn't in effect last Christmas when he'd slid down the chimney with my Irish Wolfhound puppy.

As we continued talking, I was taken with the new workshop for his elves. Having written about art for many years, it was right up my alley. Two giant plush reindeer, designed by Studie Artefact in Quebec, pulled a giant sleigh while an elf painted a deer portrait and another carved away at an ice sculpture.

Cody Owens of Garden City was impressed with the workshop, too. After first telling Santa he wanted Buzz Lightyear and Slinky the Dog, the 2 1/2-year-old pointed to one animated creature balancing a stack of presents and asked, "What's that?"

Santa roared with laughter. "One of my elves!" "Last year he would have nothing to do with Santa," confided mom Paula. "This year, we've already seen him three or four times. He keeps asking for trucks and trains and Hot Wheels."

Brian Young, 6, also wanted Buzz Lightyear in addition to Nintendo 64.

Katie Young, 2, longed for Winnie-the-Pooh slippers. Mother Cindy and grandmother Rhea Young brought the children all the way from Salem Township for the fun.

Ashley Kuhn, 7, of Livonia read off a carefully written list which included a 20-inch bike, Barbie Ice Skates, and Doodle Bear.

Later that afternoon, I followed Santa to Westland Shopping Center where the children were asking Santa for a lot of dalmatians and Barbies. As an orchestra of giant polar bears played all around his chair, Gail Bird of Westland coaxed her 2 1/2-year-old granddaughter Jasmine Marks into telling the big guy she wanted a refrigerator to make Kool-Aid.

"This is the first year she really understands. So seeing Santa is really exciting," Bird said.

At the Somerset Collection in Troy, Katie Adams, 3, and Erik Adams, 15-months, were anxiously waiting for Santa's arrival. "I want a castle and a grocery cart, and Erik would like a train and a riding toy," big sis Katie told Santa.

"She's an old pro at this," said mother Nancy of Birmingham. "She was three-months old, her first time on Santa's knee."

Back at the Livonia Mall, Santa was wiring his sleigh for the big trip. Years ago, his memory was sharp as a tack. Now, a computer keeps track of the millions of Christmas Eve deliveries. "I'm more than 100 years old now. Mrs. Claus prints out my list before I leave the North Pole," said the jolly old guy who was nothing more than a big elf himself.

I was heading for the door, exhausted from my day when he shouted, "you forgot to tell me what you wanted for Christmas."

I told Santa that puppy had been a bundle of trouble this past year but I forgave him because Shamu and I had become the best of friends. I wanted nothing for myself. My only wish for boys and girls everywhere, was for all to have enough to eat, and a warm, secure place to sleep.

"And my only wish," Santa Claus whispered to me, "is for peace around the world."



Linda Ann Chomin

Toys that endure must entertain



If you're stumped for last-minute gift ideas for the kids on your list, think "interactive, creative and challenging" say the experts. Here are some suggestions for toys that will please.

By SUSAN DEMAGGIO
EDITOR

With just two days until Christmas, don't despair if you haven't got a *Tickle Me Elmo* under your tree. There are still plenty of wonderful toy options available in the marketplace.

Susan Apel, spokeswoman for The Learning Tree Stores (Summit Crossing in Waterford, Schoenherr & M58 in Sterling Heights, and West Oaks in Novi) suggests two winners — an easel that comes with a large roll of paper for \$63, or the *I-Spy Memory Game*, \$16.99.

"One side of the easel is a wipe-off board, the other a chalk board," she explained. "Our merchandise is of institutional quality so these gifts will be around for many years to come."

Kathy Kalmar, education coordinator for U of M-Deerborn's Child Development Center said the best children's gifts can be described as: "interactive, open-ended, challenging, creative and keyed to nature."

Kalmar said a good rule of thumb is "never buy anything battery-operated."

"Gifts that perform or entertain don't expect anything from a child and won't have much play value."

Ava Demonia, marketing director at Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn used Kalmar's advice to come up with these gift suggestions from mall stores:

Little House on the Prairie gift box sets from Waldenbooks, priced from \$22-\$60; **Tiger's Big Screen Microscope** from Natural Wonders, \$60 (comes with an instruction kit and experiment book); **The Adventures of Pinocchio** or **Muppet Treasure Island** video games from \$29.99 at Babbage's offering discovery activities that require user output; downhill skis from Dunham's \$189-\$300, cross country skis start at \$100; **Art Workshop** kits from KayBee Toys, prices vary.

At FAO Schwarz in the Somerset Collection, Troy, shoppers will find

collectible toys for children to begin years of adding specially-designed playthings to a set. Perennial favorites include Madame Alexander dolls, Barbies, GI Joes, and Star Wars licensed products.

"We have reissues of toys from old FAO Schwarz catalogs going back over 70 years," said chairman John Eyer in a news release. "And as much as grown-ups enjoy collecting for themselves, there is a joy in getting children started on their own collections for the first time."

His picks: Antique Rose Barbie Doll, \$260; Statue of Liberty Barbie Doll, \$75; FAO Barbie, \$24.99; GI Joe Astronaut with book, \$100; Star Wars Figures, \$29 each; Johnny Lightening Wacky Winners "die-cast metal replicas of wild creations," \$79; Matchbox Collectibles, sets for \$25; FAO's Barrel of Heads, \$59; Famous city editions of Monopoly, \$28.

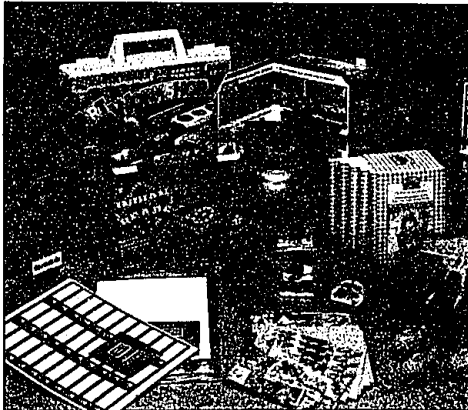
Target's Top 10 Toys:

- Wonder World, aquarium activity set
- Baby Go Bye, Bye from Kenner includes baby doll and carrier that converts to a bed, backpack and feeding seat
- Pet Doctor, Barbie's decked in white labcoat comes with stethoscope, medical kit, cat and dog patients
- Penguin Shuffle Game: Let them waddle and walk down a slide to land on a merry-go-round.
- Hot Wheels Five-Pack
- Star Wars Action Figures
- Amv Sport Tablet: converts for ping pong, billiards, foosball and basketball
- Disney Touch and Crawl Babies
- Talk Boy Recorder: Record and distort voices.
- Tickle Me, Elmo



PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Scene stealer: Cinderella's Enchanted Castle, available at The Disney Stores and Toys 'R Us, is a popular holiday choice this year. The floor spins for dancing, doors open and close, and the stairway moves to reveal the missing glass slipper.



Holiday happiness: These treasures can be found at the stores of Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn.



Nostalgic fun: "Vanessa," a 15-inch Carolle Doll, \$115, from the Doll Hospital and Toy Soldier Shop in Berkley, is poseable and dressed for play. The store is famous for its collection of "old-fashioned" playthings and toys for the outdoors. Among its best-selling items is the Muffy Vander Bear line of costumed cuddlies.

Where can I find?

Thanks to the readers who have phoned in locations for hard to find items!

• Judy Uridge informs that she saw the gag gift featuring cans and straws built into a cap, at Gage 'N Gifts in Farmington and Livonia. "Sus" said she always sees the item in the *Harriet Carter* catalogs at her father's house.

• Karen Edwards reports a great source for typewriter or printer ribbons is the Quill Corporation in Lincolnshire, Ill., 1-800-789-8965.

We're still looking for:

- A dry bar, 3-feet wide by 15-inches deep with a cover that lifts up to replace one that is 20 years old. The caller said furniture stores only seem to carry wet bars.
- A grocery store that sells Magic Baking Powder made by Nabisco of Toronto. The caller doesn't want to travel to Canada to buy it.
- A store that sells *Math To Go*, Math Tutor by Texas Instruments.
- Almay hypo-allergenic all-over body splash.
- Someone who will alter old draperies to fit new windows.
- King-size flat sheets from Martex in the Trade Blanket pattern.
- Laundry bags that hang from the ceiling over the chute with zip-pens on the bottom to let out the dirty clothes.
- A Strollchair highchair tray; Inker stainless steel cookware.
- An April 1945 edition of *For* Times magazine.
- Glass covers for Guardianware pots and pans.

If you've seen any of these items in your travels, please let Malls & Mainstreets know and we'll print the answers. Call (810) 901-2567.

MONDAY, DEC. 23

Santa Photos

Last days for photos and visits with Santa Claus at area malls. Don't miss some of the more spectacular deer presentations at Twelve Oaks, Somerset Collection North, Livonia Mall, Lakeside, Fairlane, Northland Center and Oakland Mall. At Summit Place in Waterford, tour the 20-minute walk-through exhibit "Wind in the Willows" brought to you by Dayton Hudson Co. Free admission, through Dec. 31.

Benefit Promotion

Ongoing Share The Wealth program to benefit Salvation Army — with each sum of \$150 in receipts a blanket will be donated in the shopper's name. See Customer Service Desk. Westland Center. Wayne/Warren. (313) 425-6001.

Holiday happenings

Red Cross Blood Drive through Jan. 4 at the mall. Spend \$100 in any business and receive a

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

free cookbook through Dec. 24. Drop off non-perishable food items, clothing and toys for local YMCA at Information Booth through Dec. 24. Wonderland, Plymouth/Middlebelt. Livonia (313) 622-0100.

TUESDAY, DEC. 24, CHRISTMAS EVE

Limited Hours

Malls and Main Street shops open until 5 p.m. today for last-minute shoppers.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25,

Merry Christmas!

Retail centers closed for the holiday.

THURSDAY, DEC. 26

Sales & Clearances

The rush is on for half-off mark downs on holiday and other seasonal merchandise at all department stores and shopping centers.

FRIDAY, DEC. 27

Blues concert

Robert Jones plays blues guitar 8-10 p.m. in Borders Cafe. Complimentary. 14 Mile/Orchard Lake. Farmington Hills. (810) 737-0110.

SATURDAY, DEC. 28

Kwanzaa Celebration

This is the third day of the African holiday. This day celebrates the principles of "Ujima," collective work and responsibility. Borders hosts a Kwanzaa program with storyteller Elaine Jordan at 3 p.m. From 4:30-6 p.m. Ya Tafari Makonnen performs music with Caribbean, Afro-Latin and Latin Jazz beats. 13 Mile/Southfield Beverly Hills. (810) 644-1616.