

Electronic age

Computers revolutionize toyland

By PAT BORDMAN

Lights flash. Bells ring. Buzzers sound.

It's not a movie sound stage. It's not the daily lottery drawing. Nor a robbery.

It's a toy aisle. There may be differences in strategy, rules or appearance. But the essence of the electronic age in toys is bountiful noise and colorful lights.

Three years ago only six electronic toys could be found on the toy shelves.

But, as Sid Ring, general merchandiser for Kiddie-Land Toy Stores (including West Bloomfield's store) points out, "It's all electronics today."

Electronics have so engulfed the toy industry that in an inevitable merging of the old reliable with the new technology, even the yo-yo lights up.

But standards still remain an important force in the toy industry despite the predominance of electronics.

"Staples are toys that have been

in the company line for years and years. They're bread and butter," explains Ring.

So, names like Monopoly, Clue, Sorry, Tinkertoy, Tripoly, Yahtzee, Playdoh, Erector sets and Barbie are a few of the many highly recognizable, steady sellers that constitute the core of the enormous toy industry.

HOW LARGE is the that industry?

It has surpassed the \$4 billion mark in sales. Because the stakes are high, the industry is highly competitive. In an effort to capture some of that tremendous sales volume, the companies continuously develop different toys.

In fact, 5,000 different toys are introduced each year. But the consumer doesn't really get to choose from new items.

"Most of the toy items are a take-off on something that's previous. An item will become good one year and then every company will go into the manufacture of this item. They're all offshoots of one item. Once an item takes off they play it to death, until it finally fades away," means Ring.

And fade away they do. One in four of the toys offered to consumers goes out of production each year. Thus the persistence of the staples gains importance.

They are the mainstay of the companies which produce them and the toy industry itself.

While the companies are changing over during the year to their latest new toy gimmick, the staple is there, still selling and still available to the industry going.

YET, IN AN industry that relies on the hard sell to push its products, Ring says the staples are only sporadically and infrequently advertised.

Ring explains their longevity this way: "Their parents had that game before TV and they enjoyed it and they figure that their children would enjoy it. And when their children did enjoy it, their children's children will have the same game. And so certain games just remain."

Norma Lesnick of West Bloomfield, shopping Kiddie-Land with her son, confirms that theory.

"I buy many things that I remem-



Above: Michael Mancini, 4, appears fascinated with an electronic toy geared to pre-schoolers. Below: This shopping cart is filled with several of the electronic toys available on the market today. (Photos by Pat Bordman)



"Most of the toy items are a take-off on something that's previous. An item will become good one year and then every company will go into the manufacture of this item. They're all offshoots of one item. Once an item takes off they play it to death, until it finally fades away."

Sid Ring

ber from childhood. The things that I had fun with. Parents stick their own attitudes in there."

And then, as if to explain how the current electronics craze really is such a success in the toy industry, she added: "I buy toys by what I would like. It's a fantasy world for an adult."

The electronics revolution has so enlarged the scope of the industry that it has actually changed it from a highly seasonal to a year-round business.

Now, instead of catering to the under-10 crowd, the industry has an appeal to teenagers and adults.

Computer chips have made it possible to offer gadgets that many ability levels can use at one time.

The first big seller in this line was Simon (an electronic game). Simon proved that a toy, a fairly expensive toy, would be purchased for the whole family's entertainment.

"Simon is still our number-one seller," Ring reports.

AND ENTERTAINMENT is what these games provide. They follow closely on the heels of our fascination with the TV, Ring says.

The video games really started this current trend. Toy manufacturers found that people would be interested in playing games they could hook up to their TV. When computer chips became cheaply available, the electronics revolution really took off.

Ring, from his vantage point of 30

years in the toy business, says that when he "was a child we used to improvise, our parents didn't buy us as many games. Today it's different. I don't think the children improvise today. They buy something that's ready made to play."

Instant play and instant education. The names of these toys point to the other big reason for interest in the games.

Quiz Kid, Data Man, Spill and Spell, Little Professor—all have to do with the intellect. Even the games that aren't directly related to increasing brain power are based on intellectual skills such as outwitting an opponent, mind-teasers, memorization.

"People love educational toys for their children. Everybody is looking for toys to make their children geniuses. They're all looking for that. They don't think education should have that big a role in a toy. I think a toy should be fun," says Ring.

WILL THESE mesmerizing, easy-to-operate, intellectually challenging, instant computer games push out the staples that have been the mainstay of the industry for so long?

Ring doesn't think so. "You can't defeat a staple. They're following trends. Right now the trend is electronics. Who knows what the next trend is going to be? Sooner or later electronics will die. I mean everything does, sooner or later."

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

EVEN SANTA needs a helping hand, sometimes. The Jolly Old Boy and his friends, the Farmington Goodfellows need volunteers to help paint wooden toys, sell papers on Dec. 7, pack baskets with toys and food and do some office work. All of this goes toward fulfilling the Goodfellow pledge, "No child without a Christmas." Help give a child some good memories of a holiday. Call the Goodfellows at 474-3440.

FOR PARENTS who want to give a book for Christmas, the Farmington Association for Educational Enrichment is selling three books for kids and parents. They are "Free Stuff for Kids" by Blakely, for \$2.95; "Feed Me I'm Yours" by Vicki Lansky, for \$3.95 and "The Taming of the C.A.N.D.Y. Monster" by Lansky, for \$3.95. The sale's proceeds will go toward supporting special projects for Farmington's gifted and talented children and workshops for their parents. Phone orders are taken daily until 9 p.m. at 553-3295, 553-4319 or 553-2084. A workshop for parents with Roger Taylor, a Chicago education consultant, is scheduled from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Jan. 23 in North Farmington High School, 13 Mile near Farmington Road.

BACK IN '76 Oakland Community College created a small stir when it decided to build a new multi-purpose sports facility. Seems the original plans called for it to be built on the home grounds of a rare flower in the campus' natural area.

The Farmington Area Naturalists raised a fuss to save the plant. But what turned the tide for the flower and the building were soil borings revealing the ground contained too much water. Nice for rare flowers; bad for new sports buildings. The natural area is still there and the new sports building was opened on Nov. 28 when the Oakland Community College Raiders basketball team played St. Clair Community College.

The building has three regulation-sized basketball courts, a first aid lab, two classrooms, four tennis courts, three racquet and handball courts, an athletic training and weight room as well as a major indoor swimming pool, deep enough for diving. The facility is in the H building on the Orchard Ridge campus. The building cost \$2.8 million to build. (Ever get the feeling OCC was designed by an alphabet soup freak?)

ALAMEDA PTA is sponsoring a holiday craft and bake sale from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 8 in Alameda Elementary School on Power between 10 and 11 Mile roads. The show is great for procrastinators because it's almost the last of the school Christmas bazaars.

HILLEL DAY School's annual Chanukah Gift Shop, sponsored by the Hillel PTO will be

conducted from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Dec. 4-5 in the school, 32200 Middlebelt north of Northwestern Highway, Farmington Hills. There will be a variety of items priced from 25 cents and up. These include handcrafted items such as jewelry, bookmarks, pillows for children and adults, baby items and slippers. Proceeds will go toward purchasing educational materials.

THE BEL CANTO ENSEMBLE directed by Sergio Pezzetti will perform at St. Mary's of Redford, 16008 Grand River, Detroit. The performance is scheduled for 8 p.m. Dec. 7.

CHRISTMAS MUSIC FESTIVALS are busting out all over. (And you thought only spring did that!) A Christmas Festival of Music, an annual community Christmas concert will feature about 240 performers representing five musical organizations at 3 p.m., Dec. 9 at Nardin Park United Methodist Church, 11 Mile west of Middlebelt. The groups will join the Nardin Park Sanctuary Choir of 60 voices directed by Melvin Rookus, who coordinates the event. The Farmington Musicals Chorus will add 20 voices in song to the event. The climax of the 90-minute program will be the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah" sung by the adult choir and directed by Mrs. Gerald Spry. Following the concert there will be a reception which allows the audience time to meet the performers and their directors. The event is free.

STILL ON THE HOLIDAY beat: The parents and staff at Children's World Nursery School, Farmington Hills sponsored a two week long series of Tupperware parties to raise money for St. Vincent-Sarah Fisher home for children in Farmington Hills. The parents are hoping to teach the nursery school students to consider sharing with others during the holidays, too.

THE WOMEN of Brodhead Farmington Hills VFW auxiliary sponsored their annual card party benefit for cancer research. Chairwoman June Gibbert turned over \$550 to the Cancer Foundation. Last year, the Michigan auxiliaries raised \$67,635 for the cause. Way to go, group.

THOSE MUSICALLY MAD seniors down at the Gathering Place will present their revue, "Musical Madness" at 3 p.m. Dec. 8 in Mercy Center, 28600 11 Mile, Farmington Hills. Tickets are \$1 for senior adults and children under 12. General admission is \$2.

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

EVEN SANTA needs a helping hand, sometimes. The Jolly Old Boy and his friends, the Farmington Goodfellows need volunteers to help paint wooden toys, sell papers on Dec. 7, pack baskets with toys and food and do some office work. All of this goes toward fulfilling the Goodfellow pledge, "No child without a Christmas." Help give a child some good memories of a holiday. Call the Goodfellows at 474-3440.

FOR PARENTS who want to give a book for Christmas, the Farmington Association for Educational Enrichment is selling three books for kids and parents. They are "Free Stuff for Kids" by Blakely, for \$2.95; "Feed Me I'm Yours" by Vicki Lansky, for \$3.95 and "The Taming of the C.A.N.D.Y. Monster" by Lansky, for \$3.95. The sale's proceeds will go toward supporting special projects for Farmington's gifted and talented children and workshops for their parents. Phone orders are taken daily until 9 p.m. at 553-3295, 553-4319 or 553-2084. A workshop for parents with Roger Taylor, a Chicago education consultant, is scheduled from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Jan. 23 in North Farmington High School, 13 Mile near Farmington Road.

BACK IN '76 Oakland Community College created a small stir when it decided to build a new multi-purpose sports facility. Seems the original plans called for it to be built on the home grounds of a rare flower in the campus' natural area.

The Farmington Area Naturalists raised a fuss to save the plant. But what turned the tide for the flower and the building were soil borings revealing the ground contained too much water. Nice for rare flowers; bad for new sports buildings. The natural area is still there and the new sports building was opened on Nov. 28 when the Oakland Community College Raiders basketball team played St. Clair Community College.

The building has three regulation-sized basketball courts, a first aid lab, two classrooms, four tennis courts, three racquet and handball courts, an athletic training and weight room as well as a major indoor swimming pool, deep enough for diving. The facility is in the H building on the Orchard Ridge campus. The building cost \$2.8 million to build. (Ever get the feeling OCC was designed by an alphabet soup freak?)

ALAMEDA PTA is sponsoring a holiday craft and bake sale from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 8 in Alameda Elementary School on Power between 10 and 11 Mile roads. The show is great for procrastinators because it's almost the last of the school Christmas bazaars.

HILLEL DAY School's annual Chanukah Gift Shop, sponsored by the Hillel PTO will be

hudson's favorite things

...discovering gold and silver

Charles Jourdan did it. Discovered how shapes of gold or silver colored leather on a snowy white shoe add a whole new drama to the spectator. Now it's your turn to discover the excitement, in this trio of sexy little high steppers designed to dazzle day or night. Pick your shimmer: Dorsey-cut pump with golden heel, swirl detail, \$140. Sleek sling pump with shimmering silver heel and toe, \$145. And V-throat pump with golden heel, wing design on side, \$150. All leather, each balancing on four inches of stiletto-like metallic heel. In Hudson's Woodward Shops Shoe Salon, Downtown, Northland, Eastland, Oakland, Twelve Oaks, and Fairlane only.