

Holidays are year-round at Christmas town

By Carole Strong
Special Writer

Stan Aldrich, developer extraordinaire, reigns over a new shopping-oriented magic kingdom in Orion Township—Olde World Canterbury Village and the Always Christmas store.

Under Aldrich's direction, the historic Scripps farm complex with 13 original buildings (once the largest in Michigan) has been dramatically transformed into a year-round retail theme park. Replete with Old English touches: half-timbered architecture, interior oak paneling (from the original Lloyd's of London), stained glass, brick walkways and old world streetlights, even a clock tower. Open since October, the village is two-thirds complete with about a dozen shops offering unique merchandise from around the world, waiting to make its way onto or under your Christmas tree.

To stock the shops, Stan and his wife, Sue, combed Europe and Asia for two years, choosing giftware and Christmas decor that they liked personally. An enthusiastic Aldrich boasts there is something for everyone in regards price and appeal. "We offer many unusual items that you will not see anywhere else in the area, a greater volume of items than in other stores and most at prices 25 percent lower because we're a direct importer."

It's hard to imagine that Aldrich's pride, the Always Christmas store, took shape from a 1930's cattle barn. Today, its majestic great hall with soaring wooden-trussed ceiling is hung with giant Christmas balls. Animated scenes on a mezzanine level vie for attention with a parade of theme decorated trees around the hall's perimeter, with more downstairs. Forty-five inspirational choices include blue and white, rainbow, jewel tones, Victorian, teddy bear, angel, children's, baby's first, circus and Santa—with adjoining display areas for the appropriate theme ornaments.

Typical ornament prices are about \$4-8 for ornate glass, glittered, be-ribboned and hand-embroidered selections. There are literally thousands, most handmade, and overall pricing ranges from about \$1-100. Especially elegant, in their own display, are the Italian hand-blown clear crystal globes with encapsulated crèche scenes, priced from \$20-68, dependent on size.

Every artificial tree on display—there are well over 125—is for sale! Specialty items include a selection of stand-up Father Christmas dolls dressed in regal robes, priced \$20-80. Large, character nutcrackers from Germany, at \$126, include a Russian Czar and Navy Admiral, all meticulously garbed.

For the collector on your list, look no farther. A collectibles room displays

everything made by Enesco, including the many series of Precious Moments; Snowbabies from department 56; enchanting mini-cottages and castles by Lilliput Lanes and David Winter. A fun display is the Enesco Small World Action Musicals. Press a button and animated animals or characters perform within a detailed set—a lighted Victorian Ferris wheel, trains traversing a mountain, mice making merry on a typewriter—little treasures priced from \$60-500.

How about a thoughtful gift for Santa himself? In the holiday ceramic display, you'll find a hand-painted, sugarplum-decorated plate and mug for the big guy's milk and cookies, at \$36 and \$18, respectively. Christmas continues downstairs: more ornaments, stockings, paper goods, ribbons, garlands, and crèche scenes.

At the Flower and Basket Shops, "fields" of silk, polymer and latex stemmed florals await your selection. For wreaths: choose from 60 decorated styles at \$6-30, basic grapevine and pine, or have one custom designed. Plain and decorated baskets abound in the stone-walled hay barn wing (circa 1870) priced at \$4-12.

One peek tells you that the upstairs Toy Shop is something special. A W.W.I.



bi-plane swoops from the rafters, overlooking an elegant Tiffany church window. Girls of all ages will approve the expansive doll selection featuring sleepy-eye play dolls that start at \$15, and more collectibles. Over 200 choices from Madame Alexander, from \$37-



Above: You'll find an assortment of decorations and holiday figurines at Olde World Canterbury Village.
Below: The Always Christmas Store is chock full of ornaments and trimmings for your tree and home.

300; Barbies, including porcelain-headed collector models in Bob Mackie fashions for \$120, and from Germany, Annette Himstead's signed and barefoot "Jule a Girl from Sweden"—eyelid attired with braided human hair, individual eye lashes and fully articulated at \$538 (it's the shop's princess).

Looking for Peter Rabbit as a pleasure for your little one? Skip the cabbage patch. He's here, along with everything offered in Eden's Beatrix Potter series—including animals, books and dish sets—plus many items based on Madeline, the French schoolgirl. Soft-sculpture playhouses for both beloved characters, each with three friends, are

priced at \$39.

Train buffs should make tracks to the HO scale Barnum and Bailey circus train with animals and decorated wagons. It's from U.S.-made Bachmann trains, and comes with five cars and engine for \$180. Five additional special-

ty trains are available.

My words for the Canterbury House's giftware are variety and uniqueness. Lladro lovers have a choice of over 200 styles at \$50-3500. Ceramic ware and vases, and soft goods in Victorian and country-style come in all price ranges. From Italy, there's some interesting glassware. M.A.R.W. makes hand-cut, mouth-blown bubbled stemware in a vari-colored design combining celadon, ruby and teal, priced at \$24.50 and \$27.25 per stem. A large selection of hand-blown pieces from Parise are surprisingly lightweight, well priced and come in a myriad of striking colors: glass bonbons, \$10; perfume bottles and decanters, \$20-75; pigtail-stemmed candleholders and larger items priced up to \$179. The clothing boutique, Off-

spring, carries special-buy merchandise along with upscale labels in infant through size 14 for girls, through size 7 for boys, 4-14 for women.

Its proprietor, Kim Aldrich (Stan's daughter), is the sole southern Michigan distributor, in children's sizes, for Giesswein boiled wool jackets from Austria. Offered in a palette of soft colors, they're appliqued with animals and scenes in children's sizes 12 months through 10 years and in all ladies sizes. Prices range from \$100-660 (some of the adult jackets include hoods and real fur trim). Jim suggests the children's versions can be treated as heirlooms, sturdy enough to be handed down through several children and then perhaps to a favorite teddy bear.

To ensure that you'll have fun while shopping, there's weekend entertaining by Dickensian singers and musicians, local caroler groups, strolling towncriers and costumed children's characters.

For lunchers and snackers, there's a small food court, a tearoom and shops specializing in ice cream, fudge and nuts. Still on the Aldrich wish list: completion of a large restaurant and pub.

Olde World Canterbury Village is located on Joslyn Road in Lake Orion, three miles north of I-75 (exit 83) and is open seven days a week. For information, call 313-391-5700.