

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

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A10

SHOPPING CENTERED



Linda Ann Chomin

Shop is a dream for animal lovers

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

Walk in the bright red door to the Animal Odyssey and you're bound to smile. I did a couple of weeks ago when I visited the shop in Plymouth's Old Village area.

The cozy space is packed with animal-related gifts and art. From a fake fur purse that looks like a moose (\$74.95) to ceramic tableware hand-crafted in Zimbabwe, the shop is an animal lovers' paradise.

Sharon and Cecilia Atma opened Animal Odyssey in November, just in time for the holiday rush. The mother-daughter team stocked it well with gifts, artwork, crafts, decorative accessories, jewelry, T-shirts, leopard print vests, hats and scarves, toys, and figurines.

Several of the items were created by local artists like Jeanne of Plymouth, who works in stained glass, and Jeannette Pugliese, Lathrup Village who likes cat-themed mirrors, clocks,

pins, and earrings.



eat head. Donna Bragg of Chicago fills another shelf with cat dolls with porcelain heads.

"We've gone to the trade shows and contacted art schools for merchandise. We want to provide a forum for artists to exhibit their work. When you think of art a lot of people are intimidated by galleries. We want this to be a place where people can have fun," said Sharon, 30, who lives in Livonia with five cats. She grew up in Bloomfield Hills and graduated from Andover High.

Sales have slowed since the holidays, but it's only a matter of time before animal lovers hear of this magical place. Pushy puppets including the big bad wolf (\$52.95) would make terrific props for telling children stories. If you own a cabin, or are into sports like fishing, a separate area in the back of the store features everything from a frog lamp to a fish paper towel holder, both priced at \$32.95.

"We like to emphasize the art if it's hand-crafted or hand-painted," added Cecilia. "We look for funky stuff. When people come in here, it's a thrill when they go 'ooh and aah.'"

"It's our first stab at retail. It's been a lot of work, but it's been fun. You have to be a jack-of-all-trades from negotiating leases to ordering merchandise. You spend so much time at work I may not become a millionaire, but I'm having a lot of fun," insisted Sharon who is also an attorney in private practice. Her office is located in back of the shop.

Cecilia, 68, is a retired Hamtramck school teacher who enjoys retailing as much as Sharon.

"It's always been kind of a dream all my life to have my own business. I love animals and feel they should be appreciated. My daughter has a T-shirt that reads, 'They were here before us.' I guess that sums up our whole philosophy," said the Bloomfield Hills resident.

Sharon began doing volunteer work a few years ago at the Michigan Animal Rescue League. She now sits on the board of the no-kill shelter in Pontiac. It's no wonder sales from a number of items benefit various non-profit animal and nature organizations. Just a step away from the llama rocker, a large wicker basket accepts donations of canned and dry food and accessories like leashes for homeless animals.



Photo by Bill Hansen

Cool stuff: Sharon Atma in her shop.

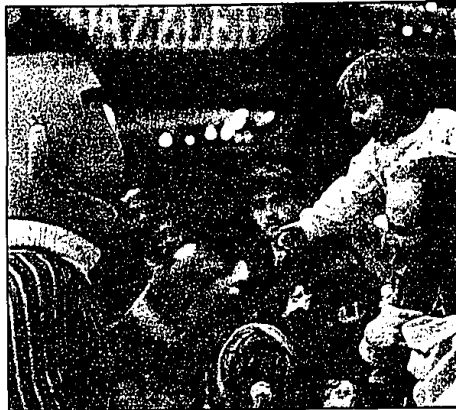
Bert and Ernie star at mall benefit



More than 500 families stopped to meet Sesame Street stars Bert and Ernie at Oakland Mall's center court last week, making donations to be photographed with the pair. Children's Hospital of Michigan benefits from the event, which raised \$300. Local celebrities munched cookies donated by Keebler in a contest to see who could eat the most.

Above: Taylor Munroe, 3, of Clinton Township, poses with her new friends; (top right) Kevin Kresnak, 21 months, of Auburn Hills gets a lift from his dad Pat as he shakes Bert's hand; (lower right) Karay Miller, 7, and sister Samantha 9, of Lake Orion catch cookies thrown from the mall stage.

PHOTO BY BILL HANSEN



Treadmill talk keeps business brisk



BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

Ever since July's release of "The Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health," treadmill sales have gone through the roof. In the report, acting surgeon general Audrey Manley concluded that since a review of studies showed physical activity directly related to preventing disease and premature death, lack of it could be detrimental to your health.

"Treadmills allow walkers to reap the benefits of exercise while dodging snow and ice in winter, and rain and lightning in summer. That's why the equipment is so popular."

Local retailers like American Exercise (with locations in Southfield, Rochester and Novi) agrees with the Feb. 19 issue of *Business Week* magazine: "Treadmills are the most popular of all exercise machines with 42-percent of the market." Store director Karl Nilsson expects the upswing in sales to continue through the winter.

"Treadmills are definitely leading the charge because walking is enjoyable for most people. But also, like me, a 46-year old male, people need to keep on top of it. You can always walk and reap the benefits, plus

there are no injuries resulting from treadmills. The new decks are safer than walking outdoors because they cushion the impact better when compared to walking or running on concrete."

American Exercise's motorized treadmills range in price from \$700 to \$4,000. In addition to burning up those excess holiday calories quicker than other forms of exercise (according to a study by the Medical College of Wisconsin) indoor walking equipment offers another benefit.

"Treadmills are the number one cardiovascular piece in the industry as far as being the most efficient," said Graham Montgomery of Southfield American Exercise.

Although ski exercise machines sell consistently at NordicTrack Fitness At Home in the Somerset Collection South, treadmill sales by folks aged 30 to 50, were brisker through the holidays. Along with motorized treadmills (\$789-\$999), NordicTrack offers non-motorized models (\$499-\$659).

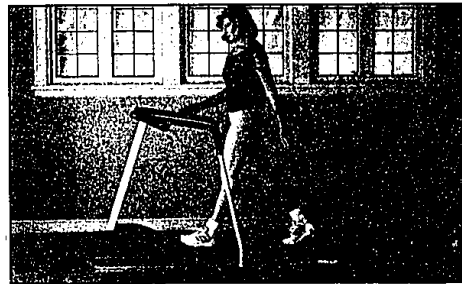
"With the non-motorized you will actually get a better workout because you are actually pushing at some resistance. The motorized machines are better for people looking for a running workout," accord-

ing to manager Ian Fleming. Fitness Things in Canton sells only motorized treadmills (\$1,200 to \$4,200). The more expensive models with foldable decks conserve space. Owner Elise Walley credits her strong sales to the fact that walking machines are not trendy. Some of the ones made by Treator are 20 years old and still going strong.

"If you are going to buy a treadmill, look for quality components as far as the motor and rollers go," said Walley. "The motor should be a minimum of 1/2 horsepower, the size of the deck or surface a minimum of

18-inches wide and a length in excess of 60-inches. There should be a safety to pull so if you fall, it cuts off. Warranty is also important because treadmills take a lot more abuse than people realize. When someone walks or runs they come down on a surface with two to three times their weight. Find out if someone will come out to your house to service it, or does it need to be packed and shipped."

Walley advised shoppers to bring their tennis shoes to the store. "A person should walk on the treadmills before deciding to buy, but not in street shoes," she said.



Walk it off: The low-impact treadmill from Precor features a one-touch scan key that displays time, distance, speed, calories and incline, plus 10 programmed courses. \$1,900.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

nar, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Receive a complimentary handbook with scarf purchase. First floor. Exitlane Town, Hubbard/Michigan. Dearborn. (810) 336-3070.

THURSDAY, JAN. 30
Starlab & Magic School Bus
Stop by the mall for science fun and information at Starlab Planetarium opens at 7:30 p.m. and again on Sunday, Feb. 2 at 1 and 3 p.m. The Magic School Bus arrives Friday, Jan. 31 for shows at 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. also Saturday, Feb. 1 at 12:30 and 4 p.m.
Meadowbrook Village Mall.
Adams/University. Rochester Hills. (810) 375-9451.
Home & Garden Show
Mall's annual exhibition through Feb. 2. Browse amid indoor/outdoor product booths. Livonia Mall. Seven Mile/Middlebelt. (810) 476-1160.

SATURDAY, FEB. 1
Kids Book Events

"Sesame Street Live" kicks off *The Great Adventures Reading Club* at noon in Grand Court. Cookie Monster will greet children and a Rockers soccer star will read a book. Co-sponsored by Standard Federal Bank. Ages 5-10. Participants earn prizes, including bookmarks, pencil sets and Peacock Cafe gift certificates for meeting reading goals. Also, on Feb. 2 at 2 p.m. Bring in a used book and receive a new one. Somerset Collection North. Big Beaver/Coolidge. Troy. (810) 816-6484.

SUNDAY, FEB. 2
Groundhog Day Stories
Border's Books Children's Corner 1 p.m. Hear stories and make a craft. Free. 13 Mile/Southfield. Birmingham. (810) 644-1615.

MONDAY, FEB. 3
Senior dance
Monthly program for senior citizens 11 a.m. Coffee and refreshments at 12:30 p.m. Dance ends at 1 p.m. Lower level community room. Westland Center. Wayne/Warren (313) 425-5001.

News of special events of interest to shoppers is in calendar. Send promotion information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o The Observer & Eccentric 805 East Maple, 48009; or fax (810) 644-1314. The deadline is Wednesday at 5 p.m. for publication on Monday.

MONDAY, JAN. 27

Cyberspace Safari
Explore the Internet and discover facts about dinosaurs through a program running until April. Co-sponsored by The Detroit Science Center and seven computer-related companies. Fees. Reservations suggested. School groups welcome. Near Service Merchandise entrance. Wonderland. Plymouth/Middlebelt. Livonia. (313) 577-8400, ext. 417.

TUESDAY, JAN. 28

Antique Show
Furniture, books, dolls, pottery, prints, cut glass and more, for show and sale. Glass repair by Mr. Chips, also china and pottery repair. Tel-Twelve. 12 Mile/Telegraph. Southfield. (810) 353-4111.

Scarf event
Snks Fifth Avenue hosts "Scarf Tying" semi-