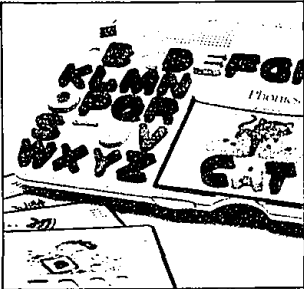


MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Sunday, July 6, 1997

B4



Phonics Desk: From The Learning Tree stores, a new way to teach preschoolers the alphabet, spelling and reading.

Rainy day toys help kids learn

Summer vacation goes by fast. Still it's long enough for kids to forget a lot of the lessons they learned during the course of the preceding school year.

What can parents do over the summer to help their children retain what they've learned and prepare for the next grade?

The Learning Tree stores in Waterford, Novi and Sterling Heights and the "teacher's store" in Livonia offer a variety of solutions.

The stores carry just about everything you'd expect to find in a classroom for preschoolers on up, from brightly colored, pre-cut letters and borders for bulletin board displays, to educational toys, books, games, floor puzzles, arts and crafts projects and computer software. You name it; they've probably got it.

They're fun places in which to walk around, and their knowledgeable sales staffs are trained to help parents and teachers find materials to match their children's specific needs. In fact, some of their salespeople are certified teachers.

Susan Apel, a buyer for the Learning Tree stores, said a lot of customers buy workbooks and have their children work in them for a set amount of time one to five days a week during the summer.

That's what she does with her own children, ages 12, 10 and 9.

"I do different things with each of them, based on what they need," she said. "One's weakness is reading comprehension, so I buy him workbooks that focus on that. My daughter struggles in math, so I get her math books, and my younger one doesn't really have a problem, but he needs things that are challenging, so I get him workbooks that might be geared for the next grade."

She said she believes that all of their summer studying has paid off over the years.

A lot of workbooks have fun elements to them, like mazes and word puzzles, Apel said. Still, how do you get your kids to hunker down with a workbook when they're supposed to be on vacation?

"I just say this is the way it is, and they've accepted it," she said. "And what's great is that I never hear 'Mom, I'm bored, what's there to do?' Because they know I'll just say, 'OK, let's do a few more pages in your workbook.'"

Some parents also offer their children rewards, such as a special toy or treat as an incentive for finishing a workbook, she said.

Workbooks at both stores cost anywhere from about \$2.25 for a single subject to about \$15 for a multiple-subject book.

Caryn Finkelstein, a kindergarten teacher who is also a salesperson at the "teacher's store," said workbooks can be used but she recommends that parents use them only occasionally.

"I would save them for rainy day activities, or for hot days, when it's too hot for kids to be outside running around, or as an activity to do after lunch, before going in the pool," she said.

The reason for that, she said, is that children often can learn just as much, if not more, from educational toys, games and other activities, and have more fun in the process.

For example, the "teacher's store" sells many multi-cultural craft books and kits. By using them, a child can learn how to make bracelets and other things. These hands-on activities involve reading, following directions, and math and spatial skills. They also promote creativity, and teach children about the culture(s) in which the craft developed.

"Phonics Learning System" by LeapFrog, is one of the many neat toys offered by The Learning Tree. The battery-operated toy uses plastic letters and "talking" cards to teach children how to read by sounding out letter combinations. It includes a full set of 120 vowel/consonant combination cards and sells for about \$60. A smaller, travel-size version is also available.

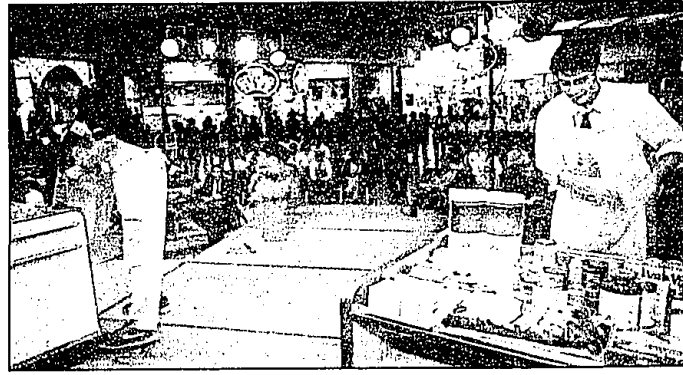
For more information about their products and services, call The Learning Tree stores (which are not affiliated with The Learning Tree day care centers) at 1-800-882-9175, and the "teacher's store" at (313) 525-0720.

Donna Mulcahy is a Livonia resident who frequently writes about new merchandise in the marketplace. Leave her column ideas c/o (248) 901-2567, or fax them to (248) 644-1314.

SHOPPING CENTERED



DONNA MULCAHY



Just bag it!

And so they quickly did!

Please, no more broken eggs! And, remember, the soft stuff goes on top! Tel-Twelve Mall in Southfield hosted the 10th-annual Michigan Best Bagger Contest on Monday, June 30 in Center Court while onlookers watched dozens of brown paper bags being filled with grace and dispatch.

Twenty-four finalists from grocery markets around the state had to bag a typical load of food products — judged on speed, proper bag-building technique, style, attitude and appearance, and attempt to break the national bagging record of 30 seconds.

Tim Skaggs, 17, of The Village Food Center in Paw Paw took first place, filling his bag in 37 seconds. He walked away with a trophy, \$500 scholarship from Campbell's Soups, a \$300 shopping spree at Tel-Twelve Mall, and an all expense-paid trip to Las Vegas in February to compete in the National Baggers Contest.

Second Place went to Robert Baller of Glen's Markets Inc. in Cheboygan and Third Place went to Jamie Keoshian of Central Shop-rite of Caro.

The contest was sponsored by the Associated Food Dealers of Michigan and The Michigan Grocers Association.

From left: Winner Tim Skaggs deftly fills his pouch. The audience marvels at the baggers' speeds. Robert Baller signals he's finished.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEYER AND COLLEEN ROGERS



Cost Plus enters metro market



BY SUSAN DEMAGGIO
EDITOR

Shoppers who love to entertain will want to check out the new Cost Plus World Market stores debuting in Michigan on Aug. 7 in Rochester Hills and Westland.

Pier-1-esque in the kind of merchandise they sell, Cost Plus World Market distinguishes itself by also offering an international selection of wine, beer and gourmet foods which account for 37-percent of sales.

The Oakland, Cal.-based retailer also imports casual furniture, paper products, stoneware, baskets and tabletop items from 50 countries, including India, Turkey, Italy, Thailand, China, the Philippines, France, England, Indonesia and the Czech Republic. The 63-store company was profiled last year in HFN, a weekly newspaper for the home furnishings network, when it went public and announced plans to open 36 more stores in the Midwest and Texas.

Company spokeswoman Melissa Oldenbourg said an additional two stores are coming to Michigan in October, set for Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids.

"Customers will find affordable prices on casual furniture and items for home entertaining at Cost Plus World Market," she said. "Cost Plus has outperformed its competitors with increases in same store sales (measuring the performance of stores open a year or more) of over 6-percent for the past six years."

CEO Ralph Dillon, who took over the 39-year-old Fisherman's Wharf basket company in 1990 and "refocused it," believes "a spely combination of competitively priced interna-

Does Michigan need another home decor retailer? Cost Plus World Market stores "Where you can afford to be different" think so. They will open four stores in the state, just four months before the busy, holiday season.

national home furnishings with gourmet food and wine is the recipe for success."

Oldenbourg said the company sees "lots of opportunity for an affordable casual home furnishings store in Michigan," which it picked for its demographics which match the company's.

Look for Cost Plus World Markets at 1316 Rochester Road, in the Winchester Plaza, and 36312 Warren Road, across from the Westland Shopping Center.

Aisles contain furniture, lighting, frames, pillows, rugs, glassware, ceramics, tabletop accessories, cookbooks, cooking utensils, gifts, collectibles like masks and figurines, candles and bath products, holidays posters, cards and papers, gourmet foods, coffee and teas, 600 varieties of wine and 100 different specialty crafted beers from around the globe.

The company currently has 60 stores in 11 states. It trades on the NASDAQ national market under the symbol "CPWM."

Their toll-free number is 1-800-COSTPLUS.

Art in the Park
Plymouth hosts its annual festival from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, June 13 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. throughout downtown district. 400 fine arts and craftsmen from 30 states show and sell their handwork. Live entertainment, specialty foods. Free admission.

Downtown Plymouth, Ann Arbor Trail/Main. (313) 416-4278.

Children's story hour
The Nature Company welcomes children to hear tales from its best book collections 1-2 p.m. Complimentary.

Somerset Collection South. Big Beaver/Coolidge. Troy. (248) 649-3433.

Kids fun
Borders Books & Music entertains with a visit from The Wild Thing 11 a.m. At 2 p.m. husband and wife duo David and Jenny Heiter-Kievans perform musical interactive program for kids with puppets.

Orchard Lake/14 Mile. Farmington Hills. (248) 737-0110.

First Flight
Sit in a multi-million dollar jet fighter, taxi down the runway and get ready for flight. \$3 ride. (\$2 with any mail receipt.) Through July 20, in the Seven Mile parking lot.

Livonia Mall. Seven Mile/Middlebelt. (248) 476-1160.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Founder's Festival

Downtown Farmington hosts pageant, arts and crafts fair, parade (10 a.m. June 12) sales and refreshments through July 12. On July 10, a garage sale by kids for kids 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at Orchard Street Park. Free table space, reservations required. Grand River/Farmington. (248) 473-7276.

FRIDAY, JULY 11

Summer Family Soiree

Birmingham's Principal Shopping District hosts Guy Louis and Chataoung Express 6:30 p.m. Free for families. Steps of City Hall. Martin/Pierce. (248) 433-3550.

SATURDAY, JULY 12

Farmer's Markets

Both downtown Plymouth and Farmington offer fresh produce, bakery goods, flowers and herbs, plus much more through Oct. 25. Hot coffee and cold lemonades in Plymouth's gathering area from Kellogg Park. Ann Arbor Trail/Main. (313) 453-1540. Farmington. Grand River/east of Farmington. (248) 473-7283.

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o The Observer & Eccentric 805 East Maple, 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

SUNDAY, JULY 6

Dinosaur exhibit's last days!

"Blasf from the Past" features eight moving, roaring dinosaurs in natural setting, plus related activities, information booths, and classes by Cranbrook Science Center staff. For school groups through July 7. Co-sponsored by Blue Care Network, Cranbrook and the Mall. Dinosaurs by Kokoro Dinosaurs of Los Angeles. Oakland Mall. 14 Mile/John R. Troy. (248) 585-4114.

MONDAY, JULY 7

Senior Citizen Dance

First Monday fun for seniors 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Refreshments served at 12:30. Lower level community room. Newcomers welcome. Westland Center. Wayne/Warren. (313) 425-5001.

THURSDAY, JULY 10

Summer Park Concert Series

Bring a picnic supper, lawn chairs or a blanket to enjoy a free concert by Michel Ramo & The Ramo Group performing Brazilian Latin Jazz, 7:30 p.m. Shain Park. Bates/Townsend. Birmingham. (248) 433-3550.