

'Tis The Season

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First in a three-part holiday gift guide series

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No out-of-the-box trends in toys — yet

By JILL JENKINS
Special to the Record-Eagle

Just stroll through any area toy store and you're sure to find plenty of ideas for the children in your life — everything from the latest must-have toys to time-tested favorites. And so far, shoppers don't need to worry about scrambling to find the one hot toy of the season (Think Tickle-Me-Elmo).

According to area stores, there isn't one — yet. "Parents will know what it is when they can't get it," said Karen Bobay, owner of Children's World in Traverse City. Andrea Pignatelli, a spokesperson for Kay-Bee Toys at the Grand Traverse Mall, agreed.

For that reason Pignatelli recommends people get an early start with their holiday shopping. "We're encouraging people to shop early because a lot of these items are popular, and we feel the demand is going to be high," she said. "We'll see it pick up more when Thanksgiving hits."

That's not to say local businesses can't predict what will be big sellers. Mike Keller, manager at Meijer in Traverse City, thinks Fur Real Friends have the potential to be this year's craze.

Fur Real Friends are electronic plush cats that, when touched, imitate the movements of real cats. Keller also pointed out two others toys that could be very popular: Bratz and Leap Pad.

Bratz dolls, appropriate for young girls ages 4 and up, are marketed as being hip and stylish; they also have many accessories — sold separately, of course. Kay-Bee Toys has them

ranked as one of its top 10 most popular toys for this shopping season.

Leap Pad merchandise — which has items with different skill levels ranging from 6 months and up — focuses on making education fun, from helping younger kids recognize letters to teaching older kids to read to teaching even older kids geography and science.

"We have an excellent selection of Leap Frog merchandise," Keller said. "It's going to be a huge seller."

Along with Bratz, Kay-Bee listed the following items on its top 10 list of toys: Barbie as Rapunzel, Care Bears, Disney Princess, Dora the Explorer, Fur Real Friends, Modifiers, Rescue Heroes, Spiderman and Yu-Gi-Oh — Japanese cards which are similar to Pokeman.

Another safe way to gauge how sought-after a toy will be is if it's based on a popular TV show or movie. Nickelodeon's Dora the Explorer and Sponge Bob Square Pants are two examples of how a successful cartoon can create a demand for themed merchandise.

Two blockbuster movies, "Spiderman" and "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," also have a wide variety of merchandise.

"The Harry Potter theme is still popular," Keller said, "especially the Legos castle."

But the season's most popular items won't just be new toys; in fact, many are proven classics that have been around for years.

"Barbie is one of those tried-and-true toys — always a big item," said Keller.

The latest Barbie product is Barbie as Rapunzel. Other toys included in the line are a horse, carriage and tower.

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Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley
Clockwise, from top: Beth Wason of Traverse City shows her daughter, Shelby, 4, Kate and Ally dolls on Friday at Traverse City's Meijer. Nickelodeon cartoon superstar Sponge Bob Squarepants is a popular toy this season. Groovy Girls, pets and accessories are a top seller at Toy Harbor in Traverse City. Bob the Builder is a popular addition to the Brio train sets at Children's World in downtown Traverse City.





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