

# Holiday gifts for the young adults in your life

BY DANA GEORGE  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Young adulthood — that age where they're off to college, the military, or new careers. Too old to play with toys, but not quite established enough to own homes that we can buy gifts to help furnish. They need so much, but what, exactly?

"That is a tough age," agreed Pat Cookman, owner of Enerdyne in Suttons Bay. Still, Cookman had some ideas.

"Our specialty is nature and science education. Virtually everything we have in some way or another encourages people to be involved with science and nature," she said.

Cookman suggested sending a clock made of stone — cut in the shape of Michigan — to a young adult who's living away from home. Almost anyone would find pleasure in a nice telescope set up in his or her apartment or dorm room. And Cookman described a game that's becoming very popular with

some young adults.

"It's called 'Settlers of Catan — A Game of Discovery, Settlement and Trade,'" Cookman said. "People who start playing it become addicted."

Players of the game become settlers on a newly populated island and are commissioned to build settlements using the commodities available to them. Makers of the game describe it as "A board game about turning lumber, sheep, grain and even some rocks into a settlement..."

And because there are expansion versions of the game available, a player will always face new challenges.

"The board is different every time you play it because it's made up of hexagons. Every time you lay them out you get a different array," Cookman said.

Cookman knows of a couple of different groups of college students who enjoy getting together to play the game.

"It's a great game because it spans the ages," she said.

Another idea for the young adult in your life might be a new pool cue.

**"Being a kid away from home, initially there's some culture shock. Anything they receive from home is going to be a comfort."**

Sergeant Charles Turner, Army recruiter

"Depending on how much he plays and what you're looking to spend, you can get a new cue anywhere from \$60 - \$2,000. If you have someone who plays a lot

you're probably going to be in the \$300 - \$400 range," said Pat Beckman, owner of Northern Paradise Billiards & Spas in Traverse City.

Beckman said that because pool cues come in all colors and designs, a gift giver might want to consider a gift certificate and allow the recipient to choose his own style.

Janice Horton, an employee at Kalkaska's Radio Shack suggests looking at CD players as gifts. A portable version starts as low at \$30. Another idea for an apartment or dorm might be a 13-inch color television, beginning at \$90 at Radio Shack in Traverse City.

Some of the most practical ideas come from Staff Sergeant Charles Turner, an Army recruiter in Traverse City. It wasn't that long ago that 34-year-old Turner left his Hartwell, Georgia home for military duty in parts unknown.

"Being a kid away from home, initially there's some culture shock. Anything

they receive from home is going to be a comfort," Turner said.

If you're sending a gift to a serviceman in Iraq, Turner has practical suggestions.

"Baby Wipes," he said simply. "A field soldier's best friend is Baby Wipes. If you don't have running water you can still get clean and smell good when you're done."

Turner says that beef jerky is "always a good thing," family photos are a precious commodity and board games can help a soldier get through a slow period.

"There are times when you're not doing a whole lot and you can only clean your weapon so many times a day," Turner said. "It plays tricks with your mind. 24 hours turns into 48 in a heartbeat."

Because, as Turner said, "an afternoon off when there's nothing to do is worse than working an afternoon" — there's nothing better than a good board game for a soldier in the

field.

Turner had suggestions that would work well for young adults in all circumstances.

"If they're from northern Michigan, send anything made from cherries. I'm from Georgia and I know that my thing would be pecan pie," he said. "But the idea is to give them a little piece of home. Things that are made at home, like jellies and jams, are always good."

Turner's grandmother sent him to Germany with a snapshot of a mountain close to his boyhood home.

"She told me, 'Here's your little piece of home to take with you.'"

Turner suggests doing the same for your loved one by taking a photo of Grand Traverse Bay or some other meaningful spot as a reminder of home for him or her.

Dana George is a local freelance writer.

## Researcher says some toys are oldies but goodies

BY SAMANTHA CRITCHELL  
Associated Press Writer

The gift-giving season is almost here but, as any parent knows, the toy-buying season is year-round.

Toys are supposed to be the tools that children use to do their "work" — although most of us call it "play" — so of course they need to be surrounded by the latest and greatest gadgets, right?

Maybe, said Marianne Szymanski, founder of Toy Tips, an independent guide that rates toys based on social interaction, intellectual thinking, motor skills and character development. "We found that toys, in general, do enhance children's skills but the skills that they enhance probably aren't the ones you think," said Szymanski, who has a 1-year-old son.

Szymanski launched the Toy Tips project 10 years ago while she was a psychology student at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis. Marvin Berkowitz, who is now a professor of character education at University of Missouri-St. Louis serves as an adviser for the toy-research project.

"There are so many holiday toy tests in magazines and on TV and by parent

groups, but we wanted academic research — from all demographics and all regions," Szymanski explained.

The products listed on the Toy Tips Web site and Kid Tips magazine are all considered to be better than average ("Think a B-plus or better," said Szymanski). In fact, most of the 30,000 toys that have been tested are simply left off the list.

Testing is conducted through the Toy Research Institute using a consistent methodology, applying empirical methods and constraints typically used in social science research. Psychologists, teachers, occupational therapists, research analysts and, most importantly, thousands of children who are demographically diversified put each toy to the test.

Some of the classic toys that have been tested with a new audience include Sit 'N Spin, Sorry, Uno, Candyland, Lite Brite, Operation and the Easy Bake Oven.

New toys with high scores are the Wok Set with Chopsticks, Glitter Wizard Hat and Power Wheels CAT Tough Loader.

It didn't take much testing to make the first observa-

tion, said Szymanski: Almost all of the manufacturers' suggested ages seemed way off. She said their guidelines allow for the different paces at which children develop.

Also, Szymanski noted that today's children begin playing with toys at a younger age than their parents did and they also stop playing with toys at a younger age. The major switch in a child's leisure-time life used to come in the teen years when friends became more important, but now children in the seventh grade have full after-school lives with sports, organized activities, videogames and the Internet.

"Think of Barbie. When we started testing in 1993, 9- and 10-year-olds were playing with them. Now, kids get their first (Barbie) around age 3," according to Szymanski.

She said the value of playing with Barbie, or any other doll, goes up as children begin having their dolls interact with other dolls because the experience becomes social in addition to encouraging motor skills. (Anyone who has tried to fit one of Barbie's stiletto-heel shoes on her high-arched feet

knows about the motor-skills element.)

Board games and sports toys also do well in the social interaction category and they help with sportsmanship, even in its most basic form such as taking turns rolling the dice.

Toys that are labeled for individuals, such as blocks and Legos — which often boost thinking and motor skills, also can foster some interaction because children are very eager to show off what they've made before they knock down their creations and do it all over again, Szymanski explained.

Parents and their parenting style are far more likely to encourage more introspective play than any toy, she added.

"Parents hand off a videogame and say, 'Go play.' But many of those games could be played with two players."

Clue, which most modern-day parents played when they were young, has new characters and the mansion has been renovated, but the murder-mystery board game is still an excellent exercise in deductive reasoning.

Szymanski says all the beeps and blinks that come from the scores of electron-

ic learning aids on the market don't really help or hurt kids. They teach colors, numbers, reading, writing and math — all the same things children could learn from parents and teachers, she said.

A regular desktop computer packaged with kiddie software is more valuable intellectually and economically than a fake, child-size computer that plays only one game, she added.

The biggest problem with all the plugged-in toys is that they take away from traditional toys, including construction toys that encourage children to use their imagination. She said the same goes for toys that feature licensed characters because creativity is replaced by mimicking traits the youngsters have seen on television.

Character development is where many toys fall short, said Szymanski. Children, however, can boost their self-esteem and learn positive behavioral traits such as kindness, compassion and responsibility when they play with dress-up costumes because they usually develop a full story for the character they create.

On the Net:  
<http://www.toytips.com>

## Christmas by the numbers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

If you like lots of company while you shop for Christmas, then wait until Saturday, Dec. 20.

That will be the busiest shopping day of the season, says Richard Feinberg, professor of consumer sciences at Purdue University, who tracks such trends.

Other busiest days will be Monday, Dec. 22; Saturday, Dec. 13; and Friday, Dec. 19.

Feinberg noted that many consumers think that the day after Thanksgiving is really the busiest day. That may be true in terms of the number of people out looking, but it's fifth in terms of sales volume.

This year, the squeeze will be on retailers, because the shopping season — generally assumed to be the day after Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve — is short this year at 27 days.

"No law says that you must count this as the official season, though," he said. "In fact, the shopping seasons start earlier and earlier as retailers realize that they cannot wait for consumers to come into their stores."

Feinberg has some other holiday numbers crunched:

- Half of all holiday sales will be in malls.
- The malls will draw 200 million consumers for holiday shopping.
- Ninety-eight percent of all malls will extend their shopping hours during the season.
- About 10 billion holiday catalogs — about 50 per household — will be mailed.
- Consumers will be spending about \$800 billion during the season.

## Make a checklist for a happy holidays

BY LIZ POPPENS  
Copley News Service

For many households, the holidays are anything but a holiday.

"People put a lot of pressure on themselves," said professional organizer Sue Becker of Downers Grove, Ill. Many, she says, get swept up in wanting to create the perfect holiday.

The secret to a happy holiday is to be true to oneself — then get organized.

She says to ask yourself such questions as "What level of holiday do I want?" and "What do I want me and my household to get out of it?"

Once you've thought everything through, start making plans.

"Checklists are very helpful; think about areas you really need to deal with," said Becker, who organizes her holidays around the following categories:

■ **Cards.** Start early. Make a list (saving envelopes from cards received the year before or creating a master file on your home computer is another). And if holiday cards are just too labor-intensive a task to do pre-holiday, consider sending out cards on another occasion, such as New Year's.

"Not only does it take the pressure off you, but it allows your recipients to really savor their cards," Becker said.

■ **Gifts.** Set a budget, make a list and stick to it. It's easier said than done, but Becker strongly suggests avoiding a stressful "cycle of gift-giving."

Wrap gifts as you bring them home, not at the last minute. Set up a wrapping station — a card table in a spare room and a box with paper, ribbon and tape.

■ **Decorating.** Some people always decorate the house the same way; others change their holiday decor from year to year. Either way, make decisions about what you want early.

Set a timetable to decorate and go through past decorations and throw out those that are broken or outdated.

■ **Entertaining.** Holiday entertaining can be an area of added pressure, Becker says, if left to the last minute. Sit down and make some basic decisions about the date, the menu, the guest list and whatever cleaning, cooking, shopping and decorating need to be done beforehand. Work backward

from the date to set a timetable.

If you plan on getting help, remember caterers, etc. are busy this time of year. If you're doing it all yourself, it's even more important to set a schedule.

■ **Baking/cooking.** If you like to cook during the holidays, whether it's holiday meals or edible gifts, think about recipes that can be made and frozen ahead of time, Becker said. Most cookie doughs can be refrigerated and baked later.

Find windows of time to cook while watching TV or waiting on a load of laundry. Stock up on non-perishable ingredients ahead of time.

Have a staging area for the upcoming holiday meals.

Menus made ahead of time make it easier to shop in advance.

## Waste not, want not

It's always a little sad to toss away all the wrappings and ribbons (along with a few misplaced gifts) after the Christmas gift blitz. Ever wonder how you can keep the waste down and save the back of your favorite sanitation engineer? Heed these jolly tips:

■ Use a gift to wrap another gift. For example, wrap kitchen items in a decorative tablecloth, put tools in a new toolbox, wrap jewelry in scarves, fill a backpack with toys.

■ Make food gifts yourself and package them in reusable tins, fancy pans or serving pieces.

■ Use sturdy gift bags and decorative boxes again and again.

■ Gave this year's greeting cards to use as next year's gift tags.

■ Recycle on the spot. Instead of cramming all the wrappings and boxes into the trash bin, sort through and grab the paper, bows, ribbon and boxes that can be used again.

■ Buy wrapping paper and cards made from recycled paper.

— Copley News Service