

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

'TIS THE SEASON

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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First in a three-part series **Top toys**

WHAT'S INSIDE

Mail rules: For holiday cards & packages. **Page 2**

Remember: Support our troops this season. **Page 3**



Shopping: Leelanau County Style. **Page 10**

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This season has some familiar faces

BY CHERYL WALKER
Copley News Service

It's time for Santa to start making his list of who's naughty and nice — and taking note of the coolest toys kids have their eyes on for the holidays.

A toy that came out in the 1980s is making a roaring comeback — the Care Bears. It's not just an ordinary stuffed animal, it's the new fit and fun bear that dances and sings "Let's Get Physical" and "Bears Just Want to Have Fun."

Debra Joester, CEO of the Joester Loria Group in New York, says it's going to get kids dancing.

"I think it will get kids up and off the couch," she said.

This bear is attractive to toddlers who love to cuddle stuffed animals, but also "tween" children — those 8 to 12 years old.

"Care Bears has a big following," Joester said. "This is a fun novelty attractive to older kids, especially those who are into collectibles."

Also on the hot list are educational toys for little ones such as the Fisher-Price PowerTouch Baby (\$30) reading system. Using playful music, sounds and stories, youngsters will discover the joy of books with their first touch. This is geared toward babies as young as 6 months old, providing early exposure to literacy development.

Since parents are paying more attention to educational toys, also found in Santa's workshop is Fisher-Price's InteracTV (\$39.99), a DVD system for children ages 3 and up. Children play learning games by using a wireless controller to interact with their favorite characters from Blue's Clues, Barney, Sesame Street, Dora the Explorer and SpongeBob. **PLEASE SEE PAGE 8**



CNS Photo

Sure to light up little eyes this Christmas include the Barbie Take-Along Tunes Jeep.

A simple shopping plan: Divide and conquer

BY KRISTEN M. HAINS
Special to the Record-Eagle

It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention. If that is true, then Traverse City's Cristina Porter may just be the mother of inventive shopping.

After years of battling crowds and long lines the day after Thanksgiving, Porter decided there had to be a better way.

While Porter liked taking advantage of all the sales and special items, what she didn't like was spending two hours in line at a store only to know that she still had four other stores on her list.

And that's when she came up with her plan. It's an idea that has literally turned her holiday shopping experience into one-stop shopping.

For the past six years,

Porter, who owns Dramatic Difference Cleaning in Traverse City, has organized a group of shoppers — mostly friends and family — who approach the "Black Friday" shopping experience with a divide-and-conquer attitude.

On Thanksgiving Day, when all the sale flyers appear in the newspaper, each of the shoppers starts preparing for the next day's shopping event by going through the flyers and cutting out photos of the items she wants to buy. Then she tapes each photo to a piece of paper, adds the quantity and color she wants, and puts the photo — along with the cash for it — in an envelope marked with the store's name. The shoppers continue through all of the sales flyers until they have compiled all of their shopping

envelopes.

Then at 4 a.m. on the day after Thanksgiving, all of the shoppers assemble at the King's Court Clubhouse, where they are divided into teams of two to three people depending on the turnout. Each team is assigned one store, takes all of the envelopes for that store and is responsible for acquiring all of the items that are requested from it. That way, Porter says, they only have to stand in one line.

By using this method, the shoppers are generally done by 8 or 9 a.m. Then they gather back at the clubhouse to collect their purchases, and spend the next couple hours wrapping them.

Porter says the group keeps improving on its method each year.

"We use our cell phones to

keep in touch," she said. "Sometimes we'll have one person just standing in line while two others serve as 'runners' getting the needed items and getting them to the person in line."

Each year Porter sends a letter inviting shoppers to join her in the event. She requests an RSVP so that she can determine the number of teams and start dividing up the stores ahead of time. You have to be an early riser to participate in the shopping experience, she admits.

"I get so excited the night before that I can barely sleep," she said. "I'm usually up baking banana bread for the next morning."

Porter estimates she saves about \$200 each year by shopping the day after

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Last year, these local women made light work of holiday gift buying by dividing up their lists by stores and sending teams to divide and conquer.



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