

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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Second in a three-part series

'Smart' toys that are educational and fun

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BY KRISTEN M. HAINS
Special to the Record-Eagle

For children, Christmas is about toys. And toys are about fun. But what if children received some toys that teach them something, too?

Toy Harbor in Traverse City seeks to combine learning with fun when it comes to toys.

Leslie Ansted, Toy Harbor's manager, made the following suggestions:

■ **Building Blocks**

Ansted says these are good for visual and mental stimulation, hand/eye coordination, reinforcing basic motor skills and practice in problem solving.

■ **Tents and Tunnels**

These are either stand alone or, in the case of the tent, attach to the child's bed. These build muscle coordination, strength and balance and encourage self-confidence.

■ **Musical Instruments**

Toy Harbor stocks a full line of musical instruments including tambourines, cymbals, guitars, banjos, xylophones, bells, drums and more.

Ansted said that music and musical instruments help physical and intellectual development while stimulating creative reasoning and thinking.

For children ages 6-8 Ansted suggests toys that challenge the mind.

A great gift idea for this age group is **Erector Sets**. They are available for kids age 4-8 as well as for ages 8 and up.

"For little kids the sets are primarily plastic," she explained. "They have bigger play pieces for smaller hands."

For older children the erector sets feature the classic metal sets which promote mechanical function.

■ **"Magz"** is another popular educational gift. These magnetic building sets fea-

Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

"Blink," billed as the world's fastest game, is one of many "smart" items for children of all ages at Enerdyne in Suttons Bay.

turing bars and balls were named to the Top 10 for Best Toy of the Year. Magz teaches children about magnets and how they attract and repel.

■ **Science kits** are always a big hit for children in this age group. Ansted says some of the most popular are kits that teach about magnetism, electricity and chemistry. Each set includes a book that shows different experiments that the child can perform.

■ For the electrically minded child, Ansted recommends **Electronic Snap Circuits**. These kits allow children to construct everything from an AM radio to a voice-controlled burglar alarm.

■ To encourage creativity, Toy Harbor offers a variety of **craft kits**. Designed by "Creativity for Kids" these kits allow kids to create their own masterpieces and have fun while still learning, Ansted said.

The Denmos Museum Center (located on the campus of Northwestern Michigan College) is an excellent source for those searching for educational gifts for the holidays. A museum membership for the entire family makes an educational gift that can be enjoyed throughout the year.

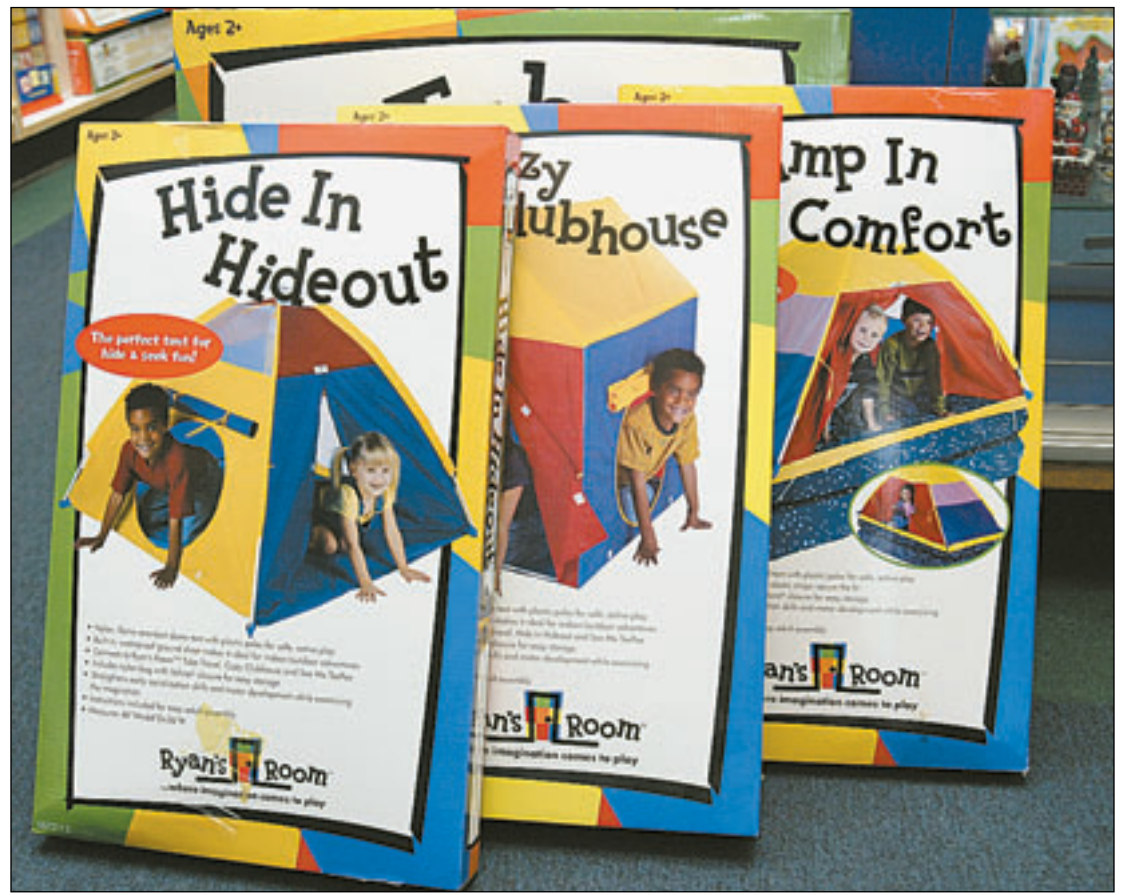
Terry Tarnow is manager and buyer for the gift shop at the museum. She varies the store's selection, coordinating the stock with the museum's current exhibit.

Tarnow stocks many Inuit items because of the museum's strong focus on Inuit art.

"I feel that's our main collection and so I try to have merchandise that relates to the Arctic," she said.

Two favorites are the books "How to Build an Inukshuk" and "Frozen Fire." "Frozen Fire" was written by James Houston who, according to Tarnow, is the man essentially responsible for bringing Inuit artwork to the mainstream.

In addition to a strong focus on Inuit merchandise, Tarnow also likes to carry a



variety of gift ideas that encourage creativity. The museum gift store carries kits on paper making, origami, calligraphy and art. One popular set is the "Art on the Gogh" set which contains a mini figure for posing and drawing. At \$10.95, these kits make great stocking stuffers.

Tarnow also stocks a number of the "Klutz" books, such as knitting and beading.

Educational toys aren't limited to just those that can be enjoyed by kids. Many new games are emerging that can be enjoyed by the whole family. Enerdyne, located in Suttons Bay, listed the following as their top picks for educational games for this holiday season:

■ **"Blink,"** the world's fastest game. Race to play all your cards first. This game teaches matching, shapes, colors and counting. Recommended for children 7 to adult.

■ **"Apples to Apples"** is called "the game of hilarious comparisons." The game is designed for 4-10 players and was named "Party Game of the Year" in 2000.

■ **"Blinkus,"** a game for



Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

Toys that are both educational and fun, like those at Toy Harbor in Traverse City, above, offer items like Ryan's Room line of tents and a variety of music instruments.

the whole family (age 5 to adult.) This strategy game is designed for 2-4 players and is a Mensa select game.

■ **"Settlers of Catan"** is a game of discovery, settle-

ment and trade. This game is appropriate for teenagers and older. It was named U.S. Board Game of the Year in 1996.

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