

# 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

Specialty Sections Coordinator Rick Gould can be reached at 933-1407 or by e-mail: rgould@record-eagle.com

## Toys for toddlers

BY BETHANY BROADWELL  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Holiday shopping for toddler toys can make even the bravest customers a little uneasy. Determining the appeal of a toy can be tricky when the products are unfamiliar to adults and the shops are geared toward children.

Several stores in and around Traverse City have ideas to make the toddler toy-buying experience adult-friendly and fun.

The Princess & the Pea in downtown Elk Rapids is a specialty store that carries merchandise for both home décor and individual enjoyment. It has a more mature, tranquil atmosphere than a chain toy store, but owner Sandy Barker still offers plenty of gifts to keep tots smiling.

She said a recent customer just complimented "her great personal service" and the fact that it is easy to browse her complete selection of "unique items" for children.

This holiday season, Barker said she expects Uglydolls will be a popular choice for "up-to-date buyers" shopping for the toddlers on their lists. These colorful characters she explained will appear in



Record-Eagle/Greg Undeen

Sally Tummelson, manager at Traverse City's Creative Classroom, shows some toys for toddlers that are mentally challenging and also fun.

the new Zathura movie, based on the children's book by Michigan born and raised writer and illustrator Chris Van Allsburg.

For the "nostalgic gift buyer," Barker suggested Peter Rabbit stuffed animals and books. According to Barker, titles by Sandra Boyton should be other popular book choices for toddlers. They can be paired with a companion CD or

stuffed character like an inspiring pig, a remarkable cow or a sensitive hippo that Barker said is "guaranteed to make you giggle."

World and ABC floor puzzles and eeBoo sewing cards are Barker's toddler picks she said are "great for eye, hand coordination."

For store hours and more information, call The Princess & the Pea at 264-8031.



Shoppers specifically searching for an educational find for toddlers may check the Creative Classrooms store in Traverse City. According to assistant manager Sally Tummelson, customers come to the store with definite intentions in mind: "They want an educational toy that will hold the child's

attention — something that will make learning fun." Tummelson recommended toys by the Melissa & Doug company, describing how their farm and zoo stacking pull-along animals are "great for fine and gross motor skills."

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## The shopping forecast: National woes effect on local economy?

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Every year, whatever economic condition the nation grapples with weighs on the upcoming holiday shopping season, with local businesses wondering whether it's going to be their seasonal reward or proverbial lump of coal.

2005 has already seen enough turmoil to weigh well into the next year, given the impact of Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters, resultant soaring prices at the fuel pump and for home heating and ongoing war abroad.

Still, the holidays are the season of hope and locally,

the mood just before the onset of this year's rush to the cash registers is optimistic.

Jean Ahsmuhs, marketing manager for Traverse City's Grand Traverse Mall, says she believes both shoppers and store personnel who serve them are ready to ring in the season.

"To kick off the day after Thanksgiving, we will be open from 7 a.m. until 10 p.m. Shoppers can bring in mall receipts totaling \$50 to customer service and receive a free gift, while supplies last," she said.

Ahsmuhs added that throughout the holidays, Grand Traverse Mall will

offer additional services and events to aid shoppers and add to the ambiance, including having a variety of community organizations assisting with gift wrapping, and live performances by local musicians and groups.

Downtown Traverse City began promoting holiday shopping earlier this year with its new Shop Your Community Day on Nov. 12. Colleen Paveglio, marketing director for the Downtown Traverse City Association (DTCA) said that aside from supporting the local economy, specific non-profit organizations received a percentage of sales from participating stores.

Paveglio says the impetus was an Andersonville, Illinois survey that found that "for every \$100 spent at a locally owned store, \$68 stays in local economy vs. \$42 for a chain store."

"Holiday promotion is event driven. During this time of year, we are simply trying to get as many people downtown as we can," she said. "The events that take place, the lights, Santa and the hospitality makes downtown like no other for this special time of the year."

Seasonal events slated for Downtown include:

- Santa's Arrival & Tree Lighting on Nov. 25
- Midnight Madness on

Dec. 2

- Family/Kid's Shopping Day on Dec. 4
- Holiday Open House on Dec. 9

■ Men's Night on Dec. 22.

"Traverse City is blessed to have a local community that is not only supportive of downtown, but passionate about it," Paveglio said. "Research shows that retail sales in the state are better than last year, but the industry still seems to struggle. Merchants will be approaching the holiday season cautiously, but most everyone is preparing for the season as they always have, ordering extra inventory and keeping fingers crossed."

One of those retailers is Peter Schmitz, who, along with wife Kim, operates Annie's and American Spoon Foods in downtown, and an outlet of American Spoon Foods at the Grand Traverse resort in Acme. Schmitz is very much a veteran of holiday seasons past, and has carefully noted the many different factors that can affect consumer spending and retail sales, from the worldwide political climate to the one on the local front that can help draw people out of their homes or keep them inside.

He says that this year, much of his optimism for the

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