

Some semblance of mechanical ability may be required

BY JOHN O'CONNELL
Copley News Service

Some assembly required. Trying to read an instruction booklet written in gobbledygook and surrounded by packets of screws, bolts, horseshoe clips, stickers, pushpins and plastic parts can sap the joy out of Christmas about as fast as a stocking full of coal. Margaret Hoerr of Manito, Ill., knows the nightmare of putting together a Barbie Dream House on a Christmas Eve some 25 years ago. "Our thought was, 'Just how hard can it be to snap this thing together after the girls go to bed?'" Hoerr said. "Well, it was no snap. We had no basement to lay out the pieces in, so we had to take everything to the garage. Well, of course, it had to be one of the coldest Christmas Eves on record." Hoerr's husband, Gary, worked on the dream house while Margaret sat with "another hundred pieces" trying to snap all the furniture together. "I did hear a few words from the garage I had never heard before, and I had to swear not to ever buy something like this again," Margaret Hoerr recalled. "It took us until 4 a.m. Christmas morning, and we were exhausted and very cold. Of course, the girls were up about 6

a.m. They did love the house that Santa brought but later found the box in the garage and thought it was just about as much fun to play with as the house. We could have saved \$100 by just picking up a stray box somewhere." The Hoerrs' daughters now are married with children of their own. There probably will always be a certain amount of assembly required for toys, according to Kelly Cullen, a spokeswoman for Toys R Us in New Jersey. "There just isn't enough space on the shelves for all toys to come assembled," Cullen said. "But the good news is that the toy manufacturers are making instruction booklets much easier to understand than 10 years ago." When buying a toy, Cullen recommended checking the package to see how much assembly is required. "The time it takes to put a toy together is going to depend on the toy," Cullen said. "In general, however, I think there is less assembly required now than 10 or 20 years ago." Cullen also recommended



buying plenty of batteries. "Toys use a variety of batteries," she said. "Getting the right batteries is No. 1. Double A batteries are probably used most often. Even if the toy comes with batteries, I would buy extra ones." If you are not handy or

have an instruction-reading deficiency, it's probably good advice to buy Christmas gifts already assembled, if possible. Kevin Matthews, a sales associate at Hobbytown USA in Peoria, recommends not waiting until the night before Christmas to

assemble a gift. Assembling ahead gives you time to find the right tools and replace any missing or broken parts. Keith Rieker of Nena Hardware in Peoria said instruction manuals for imported items can be difficult to understand. But he has seen a big improvement in clarity in instruction books for American-made products. "The instruction book for a Weber grill, for instance, is easy to understand and there are plenty of pictures in the instructions," Rieker said. "I would say most people could put a Weber grill together without any trouble. But if you are putting together a big storage shed or something like that I might recommend someone who is not good with tools or good at following instructions just get someone handy to do it." And while it seems silly to say "read the instruction book" before tackling the job. Don't try to "wing it." But for some of us, tab Q and slot Z will never line up, and there will always be some missing bolts or extra washers when the job is thought to be completed.

Also, consider these selected "last minute toy assembly hints" from www.toytips.com: ■ Special tools. While you're still in the store, holding that perfect gift, ask a salesperson if any special tools are needed to assemble the toy. Proper tools ensure less damage to the toy during assembly and a more secure fit afterward. Many companies have a toll-free information number. ■ Play with it. Once the toy has been assembled, run your own test. Play with the toy yourself so that you can see how — and if — it works before placing it under the tree. Video games and video game systems require special attention. Practice hooking the system up to your television while the child is out of the house. This simple step will ensure that the system is compatible with your television and will help speed things up on the special day.

Catch all three Holiday Gift Guides and Hometown Holidays at www.record-eagle.com under the 'Special Sections' banner

Socks • Apparel • Accessories

BACKCOUNTRY
227 E. Front St., Traverse City
231-946-1339

12/8.827713.9g smartwool

Amusement Equipment
Makes Great Family Entertainment!

GRAND TRAVERSE VENDING

Sale!

- Pool Tables
- Juke Boxes
- Video Games
- Foosball Tables
- Pinball Machines

1207 Woodmere, Traverse City
231-946-7003 • 866-339-GAME

DEWEESE HARDWARE

Power Glide 5.5 Amp 1/2" Hammer Drill

- 5.5 Amp
- 0-3000 rpm
- Chuck size: 1/2"
- 0.4" drilling capacity for steel
- 0.78" drilling capacity for wood
- 0.5" drilling capacity for concrete
- Weight: 4 lbs.
- UL listed

Open Mon.-Fri. 7 a.m.-7 p.m.
Sat. 7 a.m.-6 p.m. • Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

"A Real Hardware Store"
deweese.doitbest.com

The World's Largest Hardware Store
1029 Carver St. • Traverse City
(231) 947-7670 • Fax 947-7199

Schelde Enterprises, Inc.

SCHELDE ENTERPRISES
GOOD EATING GIFT CERTIFICATES
ARE REDEEMABLE AT ANY OF OUR
RESTAURANTS THROUGHOUT MICHIGAN.
FOR LOCATIONS AND MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE VISIT US ONLINE:
michiganmenu.com
OR CALL 616 957-0130 X10