

Not Too Late for Toys

A last-minute tour of Eugene's non-toxic toy options

Every mom knows the more money you spend on a present, the higher the chances are that the recipient will spend hours playing with the gift wrap and the box. Just as certain is the fact that the under-five set considers sticking toys in their mouths a normal part of their play routine. Luckily, Eugene's toy stores offer a plethora of safe non-toxic toys for kids who like to play with their gifts as well as the box they came in.

The Holiday Market offers one last chance to shop for procrastinating toy purchasers who want to buy local products direct from the artisans. From Dec. 22-24, you can choose from Sleeping Dog Puzzles, Softdough and Terrapin Toys, or you can juggle with Funstyx made from recycled rubber, among many other options, while you stroll the market listening to music and sampling local foods.

Heading downtown, Sweet Potato Pie offers little wooden sailboats that actually float, made locally by Mike's Woodworking, along with hemp clothing for the little ones. If that doesn't float your boat, wander one

door down to Eugene Toy and Hobby, where you can find wooden marionettes, cool American-made license plates for your bike and Eugene-produced geodesic dome toys. Alan Agerter, co-proprietor of the store, warns that these wooden and non-toxic toys have been selling out fast this year.

Over at Fifth Street Public Market (and also at Valley River Center for shoppers who choose to brave the mall) Elephant's Trunk is packed with toys for the cautious consumer. Robin Meyers is happy to pull

out a folder full of letters from each vendor the store buys from that attest to the safety of the toys. The store also maintains a list of which toys are not made in China for customers concerned with the recent lead paint issues with some Chinese-made toys.

Wooden toys are hot this year, the stores say, and the Green Guide (www.thegreenguide.com) suggests going with any solid wood, as pressed woods like plywood and particle board are made with glues that can give off toxic fumes like formaldehyde. If you look at the edges of the toys, you can often see the layers of pressed wood, according to the Guide.

Continuing east on 5th Avenue you'll come to Bambini, where you can find wooden toys both local and imported. The

store sells Oregon-made wooden toys from Papa Don's, including colorful rattles that are made with lead-free paint and a food-grade oil finish. The store also sells wooden rattles made in Oregon by Earnest Efforts. All Earnest Efforts wood is from discarded sources, and no living trees are cut for their products. Earnest Efforts can also be found back at the Holiday Market.

Bambini and Elephant's Trunk both offer environmentally friendly Plan Toys from Thailand. Plan uses water-based non-toxic paints and the wood from rubber trees that would otherwise have been burned and made into charcoal. The company gets a good score from Ethical Consumer Research Association and makes everything from dolls to wooden cars.

Several local stores offer PVC- and phthalate-free LEGO toys (the word LEGO comes from the Danish phrase *lege godt*, meaning play well) and, for the older child, many board games offer safe play options.

For those who want to truly avoid consumerism for the holidays but still feel compelled to give, think about giving an otter or a penguin — on paper anyway. Defenders of Wildlife offers adoption packages from \$25 to \$100. For these and a few other consumptionless giving options, see below. — Camilla Mortensen



Bleeding At the Holidays

Giving for exceptionally good reasons

OK, I was going to write about Fun! Gifts! For! People! With! Chronic! Diseases! (like the fabulous aDorn bags for people with diabetes, pictured, available at www.adorndesigns.com, or the super-fun "Groovy Patches" for insulin pump set sites, available at www.groovypatches.com), but in quick succession I met two fellow diabetics (one type I like me, one type II) who don't have health insurance.

And it didn't seem so much fun anymore. I mean, hey, for them and other people with chronic diseases, perhaps some gift cards for pharmacies? A membership to those associations dedicated to finding cures for chronic diseases? Or, um, how about a stem cell line? Those things aren't as bright as a Groovy Patch or a pink leopard skin for an insulin pump, but they *do* show your love.

Anyway. When I'm not bleeding from my glucose-tested fingers, I'm a bleeding-heart gift giver. Here are some last-minute happy liberal gifts that also make the recipient feel loved; just make sure you select the appropriate item for the appropriate person and donate in his or her name.



For the Soft Cuddly Environmentalists on your list, Defenders of Wildlife offers the Wildlife Adoption Center (www.wildlifeadoption.org). It's too late to get the cuddly stuffed animals (plus certificate of adoption) in time for Christmas Day, but it's never too late to try to help save penguins, wolves, sea otters, hummingbirds or any of those other charismatic macrofauna by simply joining and contributing to DoW.

For Former and Future Peace Corps Volunteers and Other Social Program Fans, there's Heifer International (www.heifer.org), from which you can buy animals for needy families around the world (you decide what kind of animals — a llama, a swarm of bees, goats, ducks, etc.). Or, if you feel (as some animal rights groups do) that this is "animal slave trade," it's easy to get gifts from the Women's Bean Project (www.womensbeanproject.com), Fruit Tree Planting Foundation (www.fptf.org) or Sustainable Harvest (www.sustainableharvest.org).

For Book Lovers, the American Library Association has a tremendous service for donating to the destroyed libraries of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (the URL is a pain in the ass, so Google ALA Katrina to find the page). If you'd rather give toward books or libraries closer to home, there's always SMART (Start Making a Reader Today; www.getsmartoregon.org). And the Springfield Library has a wishlist on Amazon (maybe you loathe Amazon, but let's suck it up just this once). Don't bleed on the books — just send 'em. — Suzi Steffen

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