

Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire

# THE DENVER POST

Tuesday DECEMBER 2, 2008 • DENVERPOST.COM • THE DENVER POST

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# KEEP IT SIMPLE, SANTA

### Bell-and-whistle-free toys get kids' brains and bodies moving

By Julie Marshall Special to The Denver Post

Despite an economy that's spiraling downward, there is one sure thing when it comes to spending, says local business owner Marilyn Walker:

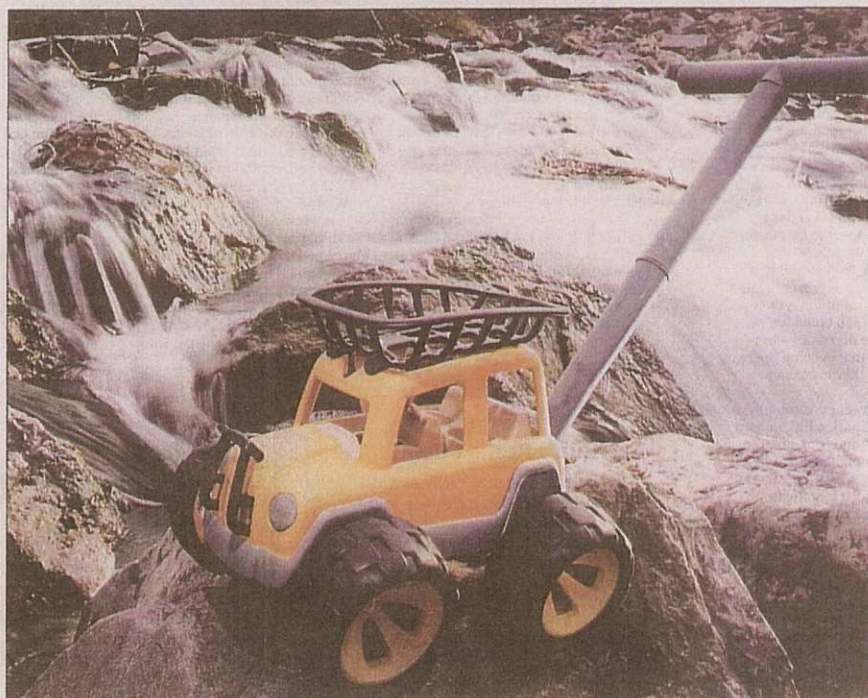
"People are always going to buy toys."

This holiday season there is a new outlook on what to buy, say parents and retail experts: a return to simple, classic toys guaranteed to last and bring the family together. Classic board games such as Scrabble, Parcheesi and Lincoln Logs (now called Frontier Logs), for instance, which most of us played around the kitchen table, are once again top sellers.

Temporarily trendy, mindless and noisy gadgets — especially those made for computers and television — are being replaced by hand-carved wooden toys and mind-challenging games, and parents are searching for the "made in the USA" label, store owners say. It may be serendipitous that products from several new and innovative local mom-and-pop companies are finding their way to the shelves of Colorado's toy stores.

Green toys also are key, parents say, as they look for items made with recycled materials and nontoxic chemicals. And finally, anything that gets kids out of the house to burn calories is on-to-buy lists.

TOYS » 3D



Sprig Toys of Fort Collins makes eco-friendly, kid-powered toys such as the Discovery Rig truck. Kids push the toy and the adventure guide in the driver's seat tells a story. Yes, Mom, there is an off switch. *Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post*

### Homegrown toys

If the theme this holiday season is to buy creative, local and green, then three new family businesses are sure to wind up on many toy lists. All are available at stores throughout the Front Range.

#### World Discovery Box

For John Skowlund, black scorpions, sugar starfish and trilobites dating 500 million years old are just a part of life. His wife is a former Smithsonian Institution anthropologist, so such rare items soon became daily discoveries for their young children.

Then the family moved to Durango and decided to share their toys with the world. World Discovery Box offers locally made, birch collectors' boxes with nine or 18 drawers, \$100 and \$150, along with a starter kit made up of a variety of fossils, minerals, marine life and insects collected around the world.

"It's a really nice experience for the family to make it a kind of center of play in the house and set the tone to support a sense of discovery," Skowlund says.

worlddiscoverybox.com



#### Think-ets

Randy Compton noticed how much fun his daughter had playing memory games using her dollhouse miniatures. And how she finally agreed to go on mountain hikes, as long as the tiny toys came along too. "We'd make up games on the trip, adding in rocks, moss and twigs."

That childhood motivation became the spark for Think-ets, a new game from Boulder-based Think-a-Lot Toys.

The game is a variety of bags \$10 each, filled with 15 miniatures — no bigger than 1 inch tall — from around the world. The idea is to pick a trinket and start a story, then the next person selects another trinket and continues the story, and so on. "We tell kids to make up their own games," says Compton's business partner, former teacher Julie Lake. "The idea is, kids have to think and interact. We want to drag them away from the TV and computer."

And for those who think all things geeky are cool, Lake points out that Think-ets was just listed at thinkgeek.com. think-a-lot.com

**Sprig Toys:** This Fort Collins company of toy-industry veterans offers a trio of vehicles made from recycled milk jugs and reclaimed pine wood and equipped with lights, sounds and stories that run on kid power — pump and push action sparked by capacitors instead of batteries.

The idea came as co-founder Justin Discoe was watching his 5-year-old son play with a toy truck at his farm. "He had so much energy. We wanted to capture that and make a vehicle with responsible materials." Today Sprig's top of the line in the Adventure Series is the Discovery Rig (\$70) that kids push to hear various adventure guides tell stories with wild animals roaring in the background. Smaller dune buggies and race cars are \$29.99. sprigtoys.com

Where to find unique toys by local artists » 10D