

Parents encouraged to play it safe when shopping for children's toys

For those last-minute shoppers, the holiday shopping season is nearing the panic stages as parents across the greater Cleveland and Gaston areas scramble to find the perfect gifts for their youngsters.

With one week remaining until the 'big day,' it's a pretty sure bet that all of the popular children's gifts such as Teletubbies, Furby, and various video games are already under someone's tree, but those procrastinating shoppers should still be able to find a suitable present their children will enjoy.

As for holiday shopping, a spokesperson for the Cleveland Mall in Shelby said that mall officials and merchants anticipated the big shopping rush for some time and began decking the halls in early November.

Merchants report that electronics of all sorts are the hot ticket this year, and of course, parents will comb the stores looking for the toys, games, and other gifts requested by their children.

Jim Long, North Carolina's

insurance commissioner, encourages consumers to play it smart this holiday season when purchasing children's toys.

"The majority of the 2.65 billion toys and games sold in the United States this year will be purchased during the holiday season," said Long. "Unfortunately, some toys which are meant to bring joy and happiness to children can cause unintentional injury and even death."

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Commission, there were 13 toy-related deaths nationwide last year with the victims ranging in age from five months through six years. Choking was the leading cause of death resulting in 11 fatalities. Also in 1997, an estimated 141,300 children were treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries.

"The most important thing to remember when shopping is to choose toys according to a child's age, interest, and skill level," said Long. "Look for well-made toys and follow age and safety information on the warning labels. Be especially careful when

The majority of the 2.65 billion toys and games sold in the United States will be purchased during the holiday season.

shopping for children under the age of three as they can choke on small toys and toy parts."

Other safety tips include -
 • Supervise children while they play to avoid injury. A toy intended for an older child may be dangerous in the hands of a younger child.

• Join in your child's play. Your participation adds to your child's fun and development.

• Teach children to put toys away after playing. Safe storage prevents falls and other injuries.

• Check old and new toys regularly for dangers such as sharp edges or small parts. Make any repairs immediately or throw away damaged toys.

• Anytime in-line skates, bicycles, skateboards, or sleds are used, make sure the appropriate safety gear is worn. Bicycle helmets reduce the risk of head injury by as much as 85 percent and the risk of brain injury by as much as 88 percent. Other safety items include knee and elbow pads, wrist guards, retroreflective clothing, stickers or bike reflectors, a horn or bell.

• Toy guns and high-volume portable cassette and CD players can permanently impair a child's hearing.



HOLIDAY GREETINGS—Paul Bame, owner-operator of Paul's Belmont Bicycle Center, hangs a Christmas wreath delivered by Belmont's Town and Country Garden Club. Trick bikes and BMX bikes are big sellers this year, Bame said.

This year's crop among the best for Christmas tree shoppers

Christmas tree shoppers will have plenty of locally-grown trees to choose from this season thanks to an estimated harvest of four million trees. Most trees that you will find on area tree lots this Christmas season are none other than Fraser Firs. More than 90 percent of trees grown here in the Tarheel State are Fraser Firs.

"North Carolina is recognized worldwide for its Fraser Firs and this year's crop is no exception," said Jim Graham, the state's agriculture commissioner. "Fraser Firs are extremely popular because of their great shape, pleasant aroma and lasting needle retention."

Concerns arose earlier in the year that dry, warmer weather would affect the moisture retention of this year's crop. Bill Glenn, a marketing specialist with the N.C. Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, gives credit to tree farmers for taking extra measures to ensure

an exceptional Christmas tree harvest this year.

"The warm weather creates a challenge because if the trees dry out, they will lose their needles and discolor quicker," said Glenn. "To guard against this, growers are cutting the trees early in the day and storing them in moist, shady areas until shipment. These actions will help trees stay fresh and prime throughout the holiday season."

North Carolina has more than 1,600 Christmas tree farms across the state, accounting for about 12 percent of the Christmas trees produced in the nation annually.

The state also ranks first in the nation in dollars made per tree and second in the country for the number of trees harvested. Shoppers can select and cut trees from about 400 choose-and-cut locations in the state.

Christmas Special

Competition 3000 Nail Tips \$20.00

Country Settings

739-9142, 204 Brook Rd., Kings Mountain

Happy Holidays from

CAROLINA GARDEN & Farm Service Inc.

2709 Union Road, Gastonia, NC 28054 865-3476

25% Off all Christmas Decorations & Gifts

excludes trees, wreaths, plants and handmade bows

Happy Holidays

Discounted Prices

Carroll - Ann FURNITURE and Accessories

Showroom Samples • Overruns • Factory Seconds

853-2122 1233 West Franklin Blvd.

GASTONIA NEAR THE OLD FIRESTONE MILL