

Toy Story

Figuring out what kids want is anyone's guess

By Rainbow Rowell
Senior Editor

It used to be Cabbage Patch Kids. Then it was Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Then Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers.

But what is it this Christmas? What toy sets children's hearts to palpitating? What makes their eyes glaze with yearning?

Local toy retailers say your guess is probably as good as theirs. No toy is burning up toy department shelves.

"I'm not quite sure what it does, it came and went so quickly."

JEFF KUNKLE
on the game
"Lucky Ducks"

N. 27th St. "Anywhere we could store Cabbage Patch Kids, they sold."

But this year, he said, nothing even compares. He said Wal-Mart is experimenting with toy displays "to find out what's selling."

Jeff Kunkle, director of the Toys "R" Us at 5220 N. 27th St., said "it's been a very even-keeled year."

Two years ago, Kunkle said, Power Rangers were a sleeper hit that took toy stores by surprise.

"There's nothing in the near future that's going to come close to that," he said.

Two items have caused a stir at Toys "R" Us, Kunkle said: Teacher Barbie and Lucky Ducks, a game. Well, Kunkle's pretty sure it's a game.

"I'm not quite sure what it does, it came and went so quickly."

Teacher Barbies were sold out at Toys "R" Us, but he said the store should be able to catch up.

The Kmart at 5601 S. 59th St. also has had

problems keeping Teacher Barbies in stock, said manager Mike Seeber.

Some of the season's hottest sellers such as the Holiday Barbie and "Star Wars" action figures aren't even selling to kids, Kunkle said. They're collectors' items.

Kmart had Holiday Barbies on sale last week, and people lined up outside at 7 a.m., Seeber said. The store opened at 8 and sold all 24 Barbies by 8:30.

Even in an even-keeled year, toy departments get crazy this time of year. The craziness usually starts the day after Thanksgiving. Richtig said the Wal-Mart parking lot was filled with people by 6 a.m. this year.

"It was amazing," he said. "You see it every year, but you never get used to it."

He and the other professionals had this advice for shoppers who want to avoid packed aisles of desperate customers:

"Stay away from the store on the weekends," Richtig said, "because it is a zoo. ... If you want a good selection and a quiet store, shop during the week."

All the retailers agreed that a hot, hot item is worth the craziness because it brings sales.

"It's a double-edged sword," Kunkle said. "It's good not have it. You can never have enough and you have unhappy people. But people come in looking for it and buy other things."



Top: Britney McBee, 4, checks out this year's selection of Barbies at Kay-Bee toy store in Gateway Mall. Meanwhile, Breanna Bundfuss, 9 months (above), doesn't find shopping for Christmas toys to be much fun.

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