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December Events

There are plenty of activities around town for the whole family, or for a parents night out!

 **November 23 to December 23**

A Tuna Christmas

The Hippodrome State Theatre

(352) 375-4477

Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m.

It's that time of the year again – the Hippodrome's annual presentation of a family from Tuna, Texas hoping to win a lawn display contest.

 **November 24 to December 23**

A Christmas Carol

The Hippodrome State Theatre

(352) 375-4477

 **December 8 - 5 to 8 p.m.**

Historic Holiday Homes Tour

Matheson Museum

513 E. University Ave.

(352) 378-2280

Celebrate the deep history of Gainesville with Matheson Museum's fifth annual Historic Holiday Homes Tour.

 **December 8 - 7:30 p.m.**

Danscompany presents "Cinderella"

Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

(352) 392-2787

 **December 9 - 12 to 4 p.m.**

Annual Homestead Holidays – A Victorian Celebration

8500 SW Archer Road

(352) 336-9096

Bask in the vast array traditional 1856 Victorian finery, complete with holiday music, cider and home-baked goods.

 **December 12 - 12 p.m.**

Gainesville Woman's Club Holiday Champagne Brunch

2809 W University Ave.

Join special guest Pat Keel, the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs President, at this brunch with a local Arts and Crafts Show. New members welcome.

 **December 15 and 16**

Dance Alive! presents "The Nutcracker"

Saturday 2 and 7:30 p.m., Sunday 2 p.m.

Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

 **December 20 - 5 p.m.**

Holiday Singalong

3020 SW 75th St.

(352) 331-0600

Sing traditional holiday carols and learn new ones at this sing-along for all ages.

 **December 28 - 3 p.m.**

Family Movie Matinee at the Library: "We're All in this Together"

3020 S.W. 75th St.

(352) 331-0600

Join Troy, Gabriella and Sharpay on the big screen in the hit Disney Channel movie, "High School Musical."

 **January 1 - 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

A Private Eye: Latin American Prints from the Efrain Barradas Collection

400 SW 13th St., Fine Arts Building B

(352) 392-0201

Come view an art form that has played an important role in Latin American arts since the 19th century.

 **January 2 - 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Highlights from the Harn African Collection

SW 34th St. and Hull Road

(352) 392-9826

Explore one of the largest African collections in the southeast region of the country.

 **January 5 - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

Megalodon: Largest Shark that Ever Lived

SW 34th Street and Hull Road

(352) 846-2000

 **January 5 - 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.**

Foreign Languages

8520 NW 2nd Place

(352) 332-8198

Children ages 5 to 12 will enjoy this educational feast of French food. Research-based École Française methodology will be used to teach Chinese, Spanish and German with games and food.

 **January 6 - 5 p.m.**

BLAST!

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THE POWER OF MUSIC

MUSIC EDUCATION FOR YOUR CHILD

By Morgan Collins

It is puzzling to try to figure out why music education always seems to be the first program cut from schools, especially when it has many benefits to children as well as adults. Fortunately, there are other outlets for music education. Here is how you can make sure your child gets musical exposure and inspiration.



Besides looking like a little Mozart, music also has physical and academic benefits for your child. For example, music's calming abilities help lower stress and blood pressure. In a 1997 study by Dr. Frances Rauscher, a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin, showed that music education can improve children's spatial-temporal reasoning, skills important in math and science, according to VH1's Save the Music Foundation. The study compared the IQ scores of preschoolers who had received music education with those who had not. The children with music education scored 35 percent higher. The findings were presented to the House of Representatives.

Other research has championed the importance of music, reports VH1's Save the Music Foundation. A study published in a 1998 issue of the scientific journal "Nature" reported that the auditory cortex, the part of the brain where sounds are processed, is 25 percent larger in musicians than in those without any musical training or experience. The study, which was conducted by researchers at the University of Munster in Germany, also stated that the earlier people start musical training the larger this area will be.

The question is, however, when is the earliest age that is appropriate for children to begin musical training?



GETTING STARTED

As the owner and chief instructor of the Kaley School of Music in Gainesville, Robin Killarney Shorter is a proponent of music education in children as young as 1 or 2 years old. It is never too early to get kids interested in music, she says. However, there are different levels of involvement for different ages. Young children do not have the attention spans for private lessons and should start with group music education.

"I have seen some kids at age 3 who are ready to learn piano, but this is very rare," she says.

"The ideal age for piano is ages 4 to 6 and much later for voice lessons because their organs for singing are still developing".

Peggy Jensen, a piano and voice teacher and owner of Peggy's Music, also supports waiting a few years before placing children in intensive private lessons.

Kids around 3 or 4 years of age should not take private piano lessons because piano is more about music theory and can be strenuous for younger children, she says. Jensen's private lessons are 30 minutes of one-on-one interaction. There is a lot of repetition and focus that might cause younger students to tire of piano easily. She suggests children should learn music appreciation and rhythm skills before jumping to the seriousness of private lessons.

FINDING THE PERFECT FIT

After deciding a child is old enough to begin private lessons, there is the process of finding the right teacher. There are many things parents have to take into account before signing up their children for lessons.

One of the first things parents should do when looking into prospective teachers is talking to friends and family members who have children in private lessons, says Miriam Zach, who is an assistant professor of music at

UF and also gives private lessons in piano and organ. She stresses the importance of meeting with teachers first to get a feel for their personality as well as teaching style.

Personality, Killarney Shorter says, is just as important as a person's credentials.

"A lot of people look for the degree and ignore personality, and vice versa. Both are important," she says.

The first meeting also is important to the relationship between the teacher and student. It helps children -- especially younger ones -- warm up to their future teachers, and it helps teachers gauge the child's skill level.

"When they come in, I test their hand-eye coordination to get a feel for their skill level. I also ask them if they are playing the piano because they want to, because they love playing, or if they are playing because their parents want them to. If the student does not truly want to play, they cannot succeed very far. If this is the case, I usually give them the name of another teacher or school to go to," Zach says.



At the time of the interview, parents should consider several things about the teacher. The National Association for Music Education (MENC) suggests that parents inquire into the teacher's fee policies and teaching experience besides his or her qualifications, according to FamilyEducation.com. Parents also need to find out what the teacher's practice and performance requirements are for the student, as well as their teaching style. MENC suggests asking if the teacher has their student study a variety of music genres.

It is important for teachers to open kids up to a variety of music, says Killarney Shorter. Some teachers only do popular music, while others only play classical.

"Kids might get disinterested. A lot of them want to play video game theme songs or tunes from movies. Several of my students have asked to play the theme from 'Pirates of the Caribbean', and I let them," Shorter says. "However, I take examples from the classical pieces, for instance a rhythm from Haydn, and cross-reference it with the more popular music."

MUSICAL PARENTS

Finding the right teacher is an integral part of a child's music education. However, another key part is having parental support for their child's musical endeavors. Parents are also important to a child's musical training because they can influence the child's choice in musical instrument. In the same way children of former basketball players often play recreational basketball, children of guitarists are also likely to follow in their parents' footsteps

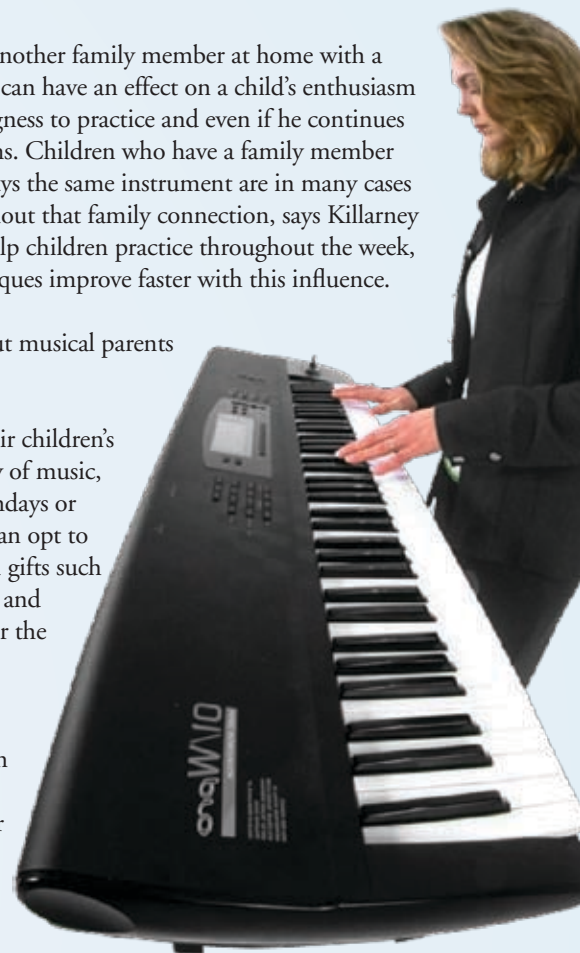
If a parent has played an instrument, and the child grows up hearing it, the child often ends up choosing to play it, Zach says.

Having a parent or another family member at home with a musical background can have an effect on a child's enthusiasm for music, his willingness to practice and even if he continues with his music lessons. Children who have a family member in the home who plays the same instrument are in many cases better than kids without that family connection, says Killarney Shorter. They can help children practice throughout the week, and children's techniques improve faster with this influence.

Still, children without musical parents can still succeed.

Parents can open their children's eyes to a wide variety of music, Jensen says. For birthdays or Christmas, parents can opt to buy children musical gifts such as CDs, instruments and tickets to a concert or the theatre.

"Find music experiences and bring them to your child," Zach says. "And remember it's about the spirit of music...the joy of it".





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Upcoming Issue

Be sure to look out for these articles in an upcoming issue of Gainesville Parenting!
You won't want to miss it!

- The crazy world of hiring a nanny
- Baby sign language
- Dealing with separation anxiety
- Discipline: is spanking out the window?

.....
If you would like to contribute anything to any of these articles, please contact Christiana Lilly at (352) 338-1920 or christiana@martonickpublications.com

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Ask a Nurse

Holiday Safety

Rose M. Nealis, Ph.D., ARNP, PNP.

Dr. Nealis is a Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Florida College of Nursing.

As the months of November, December and January approach, families and friends plan get-togethers to celebrate the holidays. During this time, children can be particularly vulnerable to accidents.

Designated Watcher

During celebrations and get-togethers, young children can become particularly elusive in the crowd. Even though it may be cool outside, the swimming pool is still there and has a magnetic appeal to young children. Doors that may usually have safety locks on may be left unlocked to allow for traffic flow and thus access to the pool. Childhood drowning is the number one unintentional cause of death in Florida for children under the age of 4. This is when a Designated Watcher is particularly useful. Prior to attending an event, parents need to decide who will be the Designated Watcher and for how long. This way you will ensure that your child is protected and that you will be able to enjoy the festivities.

Holiday Plants

Err on the side of safety when selecting holiday plant decorations. The holiday season can place child in a new environment, exposing him or her to potentially harmful plants. The berries of American mistletoe and holly are bright red and attractive to children. They constitute choking hazards and may also cause stomach upset and vomiting. Holly berries were identified as a cause of death in a toddler that consumed 20 to 30 berries. Pick up any dropped berries immediately. Jerusalem Cherry is a plant with bright orange to scarlet-colored berries and the entire plant is toxic. Bittersweet is another holiday seasonal plant that is poisonous. The unripe berries are particularly toxic and can cause slowing of the heart rate, sedation and headaches. Chrysanthemums, the pom-pom shaped flowers commonly given as gifts in the fall and winter, can cause vomiting and diarrhea if ingested by a child. Heightened awareness is needed where these plants are displayed because they may be at stroller or grocery cart level in stores and toddlers may reach out and grab the plants or berries. At least the highly popular poinsettia is not poisonous; it is only an urban legend.

Clean Up

After parties, make sure all glasses are emptied and placed out of the reach of toddlers and preschoolers. Party remains left until the next morning may be found by the early rising child and consumed. This has led to alcoholic intoxication and or choking hazards among small children.

Visiting

Remember that all homes you visit may not be childproofed and that older family members may not have childproof caps on their medication. When you visit, do a visual survey of the house you are visiting for any potential hazards and remove your child from the vicinity of the hazard.

Awareness of these potential hazards and prevention of accidents will contribute to the overall enjoyment and happiness of celebrating holidays with family and friends.



To submit topics of interest or questions, please e-mail Christiana@martonick-publications.com

Mother of the Month

Gina Fox

Every month we feature a mother in Gainesville of outstanding character – a woman who contributes to the community and is dedicated to her children.

By Jessica Warshaver

Gina Fox is a Gainesville mother from Islamorada of the Florida Keys, and now lives with her husband and 5-year-old son, Phoenix. When he was just 6 months old, Phoenix was diagnosed with Pompe disease, a rare disorder that disables the heart and muscles. Fox opened her “unique boutique,” Down to Earth, in her hometown 10 years ago, but was forced to leave the business when her son’s condition demanded her full attention. Fox recently reopened her store in the Oaks Mall, and she donates 10 percent of her proceeds to the Phoenix Fox foundation, an organization geared at finding a cure for muscular dystrophy. Fox feels she has raised awareness for her son’s disease through her work at the store and hopes to inspire others to realize just how fabulous life is.



What do you enjoy most about your children?

I enjoy the lessons that are learned. The biggest lesson for Phoenix is appreciation of the little things. He has also taught me my biggest lessons in life, such as how short life is.

What do you hope to impart on your child?

I hope that he learns to leave the world a better place. I want to teach him to just stare adversity in the face because he has a lot of disabilities that will limit him.

What is your favorite thing about raising children in Gainesville?

The University of Florida and Shands Hospital is why we moved

here. The hospital and community is just so wonderful and supportive.

What is your favorite memory of growing up?

My favorite memory of growing up is the sunsets in the Florida Keys and boating.

What is the most important thing you've learned from your mother?

I learned from her to be myself and not to follow others, and to create my own destiny.

What is something about you that no one knows?

I don't really have any secrets that no one knows about me because my life is an open book.

Do you have a hidden talent?

I play the piano, and I can sing a little. I have played and sang since I was five years old.

What do you enjoy doing around town?

I love going to Micanopy. I also like shopping the local boutiques and dining at Dragonfly.



Do you know an Outstanding Mother?

Write in and let us know of an outstanding mother in Gainesville. She may be featured in our upcoming publication! Write to:
Martonick Publications, Inc., Attn: Mother of the Month, 4703 NW 53rd Avenue, Suite B-2, Gainesville, FL 32606.

Crafts for Kids

By: Ashley Faucette

Paper Plate Snowman

Just because it doesn't snow in Florida doesn't mean that you can't make the coolest snowman in town! This craft is fun and easy to make, and you can save it all year around because this snowman never melts!

Materials

- 2 White paper plates
- Black construction paper
- Red construction paper
- Orange construction paper
- Red (or any colored) felt
- Markers, crayons, glitter, buttons (anything to decorate the plates of your snowman)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Googly eyes



Directions:

1. Cut the off the outer rim on only one of the paper plates to make it smaller. (Save the outer rim for a scarf if you don't have any felt)
2. Glue the smaller plate on the tip of the larger one.
3. Cut a top hat and boots out of the black construction paper
4. Cut mittens out of the red construction paper
5. Cut out a strip out of the colored felt of your choice to make a scarf (or color the rim of the plate any color you'd like and glue it around the snowman like we did!)
6. Cut a carrot-shaped nose out of the orange construction paper
7. Glue each piece to the plates accordingly (see photo). Don't forget the googly eyes!
8. On the larger plate add three buttons down the middle, or cut some out of construction paper, or draw them with crayons or markers (you may use whatever you would like).
9. Now get creative and add some glitter and color to your snowman!
10. Use it as a cool holiday decoration!



Weekend Parenting

Barnyard Buddies

By Gayle Shlafer

The Barnyard Buddies program at Morningside Nature Center gives children the opportunity to feed animals they normally only read about in stories. We know cows say “moo” and sheep say “baah,” but children’s books never tell you how or what animals eat.

We arrived at Morningside Nature center at feeding time, but there’s a small walk from the parking lot to the actual center. We rushed from the car to the farm and found we arrived in time to feed the horse, Teddy, and the cow, Penny.

Bob and Merald, both employees of the city of Gainesville’s Nature Operations Division, set up a hay bale so the kids could take handfuls and feed the animals. Ben, 5, and Sammy, 4, joined a 2-year-old boy in giving Teddy and Penny their lunch. All three children giggled as they raced back and forth between the hay bale and the animals. Ben bravely fed the animals directly. It made me nervous (that cow had a really long tongue), and I had to tell myself the city wouldn’t create a program that held a chance of a child getting bit by a large animal. Sammy was a little more skittish and threw the hay in a close proximity to the animal. I would venture to say Teddy and Penny each had a hearty lunch.

Then we moved on to the chickens. The boys took handfuls of corn and threw them into the fenced-in chicken yard. None of them had accurate aim and the grass surrounding us received more corn than the chickens. I had visions of the corn going into a child’s eye, but thankfully, that didn’t happen. Sammy enjoyed the chickens more than the larger animals because a wire fence separated us from them, as opposed to the wooden fence with wide spaces around the horse and cow.





Next came the sheep. Another hay bale was placed near the sheep and the boys took turns grabbing handfuls and shoving them at the animals. This wasn't as exciting as feeding the larger animals, however, so soon they drifted to other chickens. Merald got more corn and the throwing commenced again, along with the laughter.

Bob told us hogs lived on the other side of Penny and Teddy, so we walked around to see them. They were a little too wild to participate in the feeding program but the boys enjoyed looking them through a wooden fence. Afterwards, the boys ran around the land, pointing out flowers and trees to me.

Ben decided he wanted to feed Teddy and Penny again, so we went back to their area. The boys scraped the ground clean of hay, putting it near each animal for a snack. When they finished, barely any hay remained on the ground and my children's hands were covered in dirt.

Sammy said his favorite part was running around the grounds and feeding the chickens, while Ben enjoyed feeding the cow. The whole adventure was a fantastic experience. It got the boys outside and gave them a close-up view of animals they have only read about. We will definitely be visiting Morningside Nature Center again!

For more Information:

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Psychologist

Tom Dikel

Thomas Dikel is a doctor of psychology with a Ph.D. from a joint developmental and clinical psychology program at the University of Minnesota. He works in a private practice in Gainesville with Counseling Associates and has advanced training in child neuropsychology. He's treated children for several agencies, including the Department of Children and Families, States Attorney's Office, Child Protection Team, Guardian ad Litem, State and Federal Public Defenders' offices. He's also a parent.

When Doctors Need Doctors

I thought this month it might be of interest to our readers to find out what it's like when the doctor needs a doctor.

Recently, by accident, it was discovered that I have a 2 centimeter mass growing in my pituitary gland. In other words, a brain tumor. To share with you what nearly everyone has shared with me, if you have to have a brain tumor, this is the one to have. Of course I am wondering about the first part of that sentence: why I had to have one in the first place? But life rarely comes with ready-made answers for questions such as these.

I said it was found by accident. I have been having difficulty at night with loss of consciousness and resulting falls. This time was a doozy. It is very, very unpleasant to wake up feeling as if you are being hit in the face with a board. In fact I was being hit with a very solid piece of furniture. I managed to wrench my neck and had numbness and pain in my left arm, after falling on my right side. Worried about spinal injury, we called 911 and I took an ambulance ride to the hospital.

First let me say that everyone we dealt with was great. The woman who answered 911 and stayed on the phone until the ambulance arrived did everything right. The crew(s) that arrived at 2 in the morning were professional, courteous, and at the same time, in a weird Southern way, kind and personable. Unfortunately, when there is any possibility of spinal injury, you get strapped to a very stiff, very hard board to keep you from moving around.

You also get your head strapped down for the same purpose. Nothing to be done about that. But the fellow who rode with me in the back of the ambulance was able to hit a vein for an I.V. while we were already moving. Believe me, that ain't easy. He was a pretty hefty fellow with a country accent. But in addition to being extremely competent, he had a very gentle hand when needed. I didn't get his name, but if anyone by some odd chance knows these guys, please relay my deep gratitude.

At any rate, one of the things they did at the hospital was get a C.T. scan to check for brain bleed and spinal injury. Thankfully they found neither, and I got away with a black eye and a concussion. However, someone took a second look at the scan and said: "Wait. That's not supposed to be there..."

The accident occurred Thursday night/Friday morning, and the letter went to my primary care doctor soon after. But because of the chance finding I think a call was made directly to my doctor's clinic. Her nurse called Monday and said my doctor wanted to see me the next day (she was booked out for two months). I went in and after a check and some discussion, she said I would be getting an MRI the next day – 8:30 the next morning, as a matter of fact.

The morning after the MRI, a colleague asked if I'd heard anything from the doctor. I said no, and if I heard this soon it would be bad news. Within minutes the phone rang. It was my doctor... with

fairly bad news. I had a pituitary adenoma – a brain tumor – that would probably require surgery. She told me that these tumors are usually benign and I shouldn't worry too much about it. Nevertheless, the next day I was in the neurosurgery clinic. Were it not for vacation schedules and my need for a week's breathing room, I might have been in surgery the next week.

So tomorrow I am scheduled for surgery. Trained as a neuropsychologist I have a reasonably strong knowledge of what is happening and what I'll need to do. BUT, emotionally, that is all right out the window. Emotionally I keep mulling over words like "brain tumor", "brain surgery" and "what if." In other words, and I really, really hate to admit it, I'm scared. Not of anything I can explain. As I said, rationally I'm well aware of the quality of care I'm receiving. No, I'm talking about that little boy scared of the dark. Irrational, unknowing, helpless.

I don't know if it will help people to know that their doctors also get sick or worse, and in at least some cases, or at least my case if nothing else, we react and respond much like everyone else - with one difference. It makes me better at my job.

TND.

TOY SHORTAGE

By Sara Ajluni

If you haven't finished your holiday shopping yet, time is running out. The season's most popular toys may soon be out-of-stock, leaving parents with little to say except for: "Maybe next year."



After all the toy recalls this year from manufacturers in China, toy suppliers have implemented additional product safety testing. The increase in testing means that stores haven't been able to restock their shelves as quickly, forcing Wal-Mart and other big-box retail stores to cut inventory.

Kristen Wagner, mother of a 5-year-old and 3-year-old, says she's more weary of the toys she buys for her kids this year.

"It seems like there's the potential for danger anywhere if you're not careful and don't watch your kids," she said.

But don't worry just yet! Small local toy stores in Gainesville such as LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too and The Toy Box are ready for the holiday shopping season. These locally owned and operated stores may prove to be a better bet than Wal-Mart or Target stores.

Gail Gruver, manager of LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too on Northwest 13th Street said she doesn't anticipate a shortage at her store.

"At first there was a delay, but it was a small delay," Gruver says. "We have plenty of toys already and they're not all in yet."

Gruver says the suppliers she deals with in China were checked out right away and recertified. Only one toy in LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too had to be pulled off the shelf, she says, and there haven't been any problems since.

One of the largest recalls dealt with toys that were found unsafe for kids because they contained lead paint. Lead paint is toxic if ingested by children. According to regulations by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, children's products that are found to have more than .06 percent lead accessible to users are subject to recall. The CPSC recommends buying items that are labeled "non-toxic."

Other recalled items contained small magnets that, if swallowed, have the potential to damage the intestines. When two or more are swallowed, they can attach to each other and cause intestinal perforation, infection or blockage, which can be fatal, according to the CPSC.

Some of the new toys for the holidays at LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too are the Rubik's Revolution, the updated version of the classic cube; the Celestial Globe, a globe by day that lights up at night to show the constellations; SLOOH Explore Space Live, a kit that comes with a card you access on the Internet which allows you to view the earth through an actual telescope in Africa.

"We have a lot of new toys that I think are going to be hot this year," Gruver says.



The store sells toys for children of all ages, from educational games and puzzles to stuffed animals and arts and crafts kits. They also have gifts for adults such as decorative household items and stationery.

Todd Meisner, owner of The Toy Box, a family owned and operated store on SW 75th Street said 75 percent of the toys in his store come from China, but he's confident that his products are safe. He pulled two toys of his shelves after the initial recall and that there were no problems with any of his other vendors or suppliers.

"When the recall came out, a lot of people came into the shop with questions, but they know the quality and standards of the products we carry," Meisner says. "People feel more confident buying with us than with the big-box retailer."

The Chinese companies that Meisner deals with perform safety tests in China and once again when the toys get to the U.S., he says.

The Toy Box carries a wide variety of toys for newborns, teens and adults. It sells a lot of arts & crafts and old-fashioned toys like the Jack-in-the-Box. One of the most popular toys this season is the PlayMobil.

"We have a lot of toys that we grew up with that have circulated back around," Meisner says.

Although LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too and The Toy Box offer unique and different gifts, they're also a little pricier than the bigger stores.

November and December account for almost 80 percent of the toy industry's yearly sales, according to a press release in October by Wal-Mart, the nation's No. 1 toy seller. The press release also said that Wal-Mart stores announced price cuts on 15,000 items.

"These rollbacks are just the start of special values we'll unveil now through December to remind people that our prices will remain unbeatable and you will save money on great products here," says Bill Simon, Wal-Mart's executive vice president and chief operating officer, in the press release.

Gruver and Meisner hope that higher prices won't discourage people from shopping at smaller stores.

"It's nice for people to start shopping at small, local stores again," Gruver says. "It brings good feelings for everyone."

For more information on recalls and product safety or to report an unsafe product, visit the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission web site at www.cpsc.gov.



Local Store Locations & Holiday Hours

LT Kids & Grown-Ups Too

1510 NW 13th St.
Gainesville, FL 32601
(352) 372-0018
Monday through Saturday: 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Sunday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Toy Box

5835 SW 75th St.
Gainesville, FL 32608
(352) 373-1088
Monday through Saturday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Sunday: Noon to 5 p.m.

Wal-Mart

3570 SW Archer Road
Gainesville, FL 32608
(352) 371-3171
Monday through Sunday: 24 hours

Toys "R" Us

6711 W. Newberry Road
Gainesville, FL 32605
(352) 331-7778
Monday through Friday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.
(Hours vary some days in December)

Wal-Mart's

Top 12 Toys of Christmas

- **Kid Tough Digital Camera (Fisher Price)**

A real digital camera that's tough enough-and easy enough-for kids to use.

- **Smart Cycle (Fisher Price)**

It's a stationary bike, a learning center, and an arcade game system—all rolled into one.

- **Air Hogs Havoc Heli (Spin Master)**

An amazingly small, infrared, remote control helicopter. The Air Hogs Havoc features a durable, EPP foam body and a flashing Blue LED for night flying.

- **Spider-Man 3 Movie Action Figure (Hasbro)**

Both in his classic red and blue gear and new black costume, Spider-Man will continue to be a hero who saves the day, especially with his new web accessories.

- **Little Mommy Real Loving Baby Doll (Mattel)**

Girls will love playing mommy with this sweet baby doll—she's perfect for your child's first doll.

- **New Elmo (Fisher Price)**

He's back on the list to tickle your funny bone.

- **Littlest Pet Shop Paws Off Electronic Diary (Hasbro)**

Keep all your written secrets locked inside this voice-activated, electronic diary.

- **Razor Ripstick Caster Board**

A cross between a skateboard and a snowboard, this new high-action sport is taking the streets by storm.

- **Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader game (Hasbro)**

Based on the popular game show, this enjoyable version features Jeff Foxworthy and five students putting ordinary adults to the test by having them answer real questions from the 5th grade curriculum.

- **Aqua Dots Super Studio (Spin Master)**

Aqua Dots combine creativity and crafting to create multiple designs—just add water.

- **Power Tour Electric Guitar (Hasbro)**

Be the rock star and learn to play six different rock classics. Connect it to your MP3 player and strum along, or rock out solo and compose your own anthem.

- **FurReal Squawkers Parrot (Hasbro)**

Squawkers McCaw is a talkin', squawkin', and totally unpredictable play pal.

Source: Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

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Community Compassion

By Ashley Mihlebach

Local causes worthy of your extra toys, time and money this holiday season



For many, the holiday season is a time to be with the ones you most love – and a time for religious and moral reflection. It's the time when people seem most inspired to reach out to those less fortunate. This year Americans will donate more than \$100 billion to charities between Thanksgiving and New Years – half of all charitable donations for the entire year, according to estimations by charitynavigator.org. But even the greatest generosity will have little effect unless you know where your donations are going. Below are some local organizations that will ensure your holiday contributions are well-spent.

Arbor House and Mom's Place

is a private, non-denominational, non-profit maternity shelter funded solely by contributions. Donations of time, money and diapers are always welcome. Shelter guests and their children are in need of household cleaning products, laundry soap, paper goods and gift cards to local stores like Target or Publix. Please drop off items no later than Dec. 20. For more information please contact the Arbor House at (352) 371-2229.



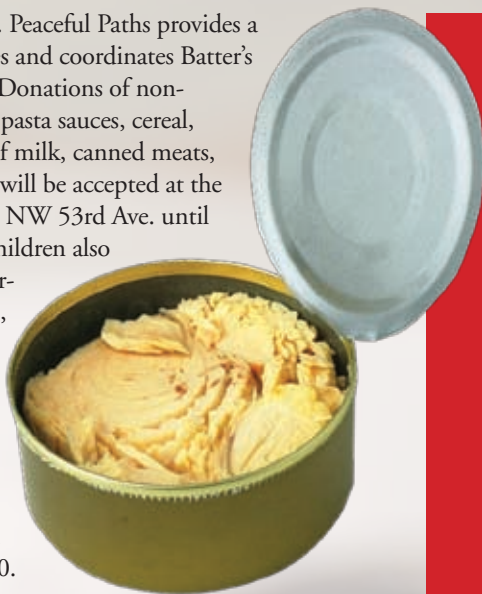
Catholic Charities agencies help families and individuals overcome tragedy, poverty, and other life challenges. Volunteers are needed for the Adopt-a-Family Program. Please bring food, toys and monetary donations to Catholic Charities, located at 1717 NE Ninth St. by Dec. 16. For more information on the program or about the organization please contact Cathyann Solomon at (352) 372-0294.

The Marine Corps League Gator Detachment

is conducting its annual Toys for Tots Drive. Toys for children under 13 may be dropped throughout the Alachua County area at places such as Wal-Mart, Eckerd Drugs, Publix and Compass Bank through Dec. 19. Contact Cary Hill, Toys for Tots chairman, at Commandant@gatordet.com.

Peaceful Paths (formerly known as SPARC) is an organization that provides emergency shelter and transitional housing for women and children who are

victims of domestic violence. Peaceful Paths provides a full range of outreach services and coordinates Batter's Intervention programming. Donations of non-perishable food, juice boxes, pasta sauces, cereal, oatmeal, healthy snacks, shelf milk, canned meats, holiday cookies and desserts will be accepted at the Peaceful Paths office at 2100 NW 53rd Ave. until Dec. 20. Guests and their children also need blankets, thermal underwear, gloves, scarves, mittens, hats, jogging suits and jackets in all sizes. Adult guests are requesting socks, bras (in larger sizes), prepaid gas cards, journals, day planners and arts and crafts supplies. Please contact Brandi Corbin at (352) 377-5690.



The Salvation Army contributes millions of dollars each year to aid needy families, seniors and the homeless. One fun way to get involved is with their Pick An Angel program. Pick An Angel from an Angel Tree, located at the Oaks Mall and both Wal-Marts. Then buy the item requested and return the gift to the participating store or Salvation Army. You can also contribute to their Gift Baskets by bringing unwrapped NEW children's toys, shoes, clothing, food or cash donations to Salvation Army by Dec. 17. The Christmas Day meal will be served at 4 p.m. Salvation Army is located at 639 E. University Ave. Contact Terri Bishop at 376-1743 ext. 310 for further information.

St. Francis House is a homeless shelter and soup kitchen that provides food, shelter, hygiene services and case management assistance to the homeless and hungry in Alachua County. Annually, an estimated number of 39,936 individuals are served through St. Francis House's soup kitchen. The Christmas Day meal will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Volunteers are needed to cook, set up, serve and clean up. St. Francis House is located at 413 S. Main St. To participate, contact Kent Vann at (352) 378-9079.

Source: Gainesvilletoday.com. For further information on reliable charities checkout <http://www.charitynavigator.org/> or information on giving locally.

Did you know...



1. During Hanukkah, it is traditional to give children gelt, chocolate coins, as presents along with real money. Children are then encouraged to give a portion of their money to charity.
2. Zakaat (alms) is the name for what a believer returns out of his or her wealth to the neediest of Muslims. Muslims are encouraged to assess and pay their Zakaat during the month of Ramadan.
3. More than 88 percent of shopping malls will host charity events this holiday season. The most popular activities are toy drives, Festival of Giving and Giving Trees.
4. Only 265,000 of New Orleans' pre-Katrina 465,000 residents have returned to the city after the hurricane.
5. More than 50 percent of all charitable giving is done between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. In 2007, Charity Navigator predicts that this will amount to at least \$100 billion.
6. Areas with the highest rates of poverty are concentrated in Washington, DC, Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico and Alabama.
7. The USDA estimates 96 billion pounds of food are wasted each year in the United States.
8. A majority of the more than 9 million children without health insurance in the United States live in two-parent families. In most of these two-parent families, both parents work.
9. About 2 million borrowers will lose their homes to foreclosure through 2009, costing them \$71 billion in housing wealth.
10. One of every three homeless males in the United States is a veteran, and each night as many as 200,000 men and women veterans go to sleep with no place to call home.

Facts and figures source: charitynavigator.org

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Kiwanis Challenge

Nestled between peaceful Gainesville neighborhoods, friendly playgrounds sits Kiwanis Challenge Playland, a place where

By Jessica Warshaver



Kiwanis Challenge Playland is located off 36th Avenue behind Greentree Park. Once inside, park-goers are greeted with a beautiful landscape of flowers and moss-draped trees, which cover a large picnic pavilion that sits conveniently across from bathroom facilities.

The park's larger playground has swings, slides and poles for climbing, not unlike any other park in Gainesville. However, Kiwanis also has a swing equipped for wheelchairs, so children with physical disabilities can join in on the fun.

A paved track circles the park and passes a butterfly-shaped playground for smaller children, where younger tots can enjoy gliding down slides and crawling through a tunnel. The park houses two basketball nets, but if this isn't your kids' sport of choice, a baseball field lies nearby in Greentree Park.

Kiwanis Challenge Playland is a nice daytime activity for families seeking a large forested playground complete with a wide array of fun activities that children of all ages can enjoy.



Playland

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any kid can find fun.



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Did you Know?

Everyone knows at least a little to get by when it comes to Christmas and Hanukkah trivia, but what about the third of the trinity of major December holidays?

THE BASICS

Kwanzaa is not a religious-based holiday but a cultural one. The holiday was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor at California State University, Long Beach. He has championed the need to preserve, revitalize and promote African American culture. Kwanzaa is celebrated from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1, originating from one of the original African harvest holidays, according to the official Kwanzaa Web site. The holiday's name derives from the Swahili phrase, "matunda ya kwanza," which means "first fruits." This celebration can be traced back to ancient Egyptian times.

THE SYMBOLS

Special items and symbols are used in celebration of the harvest, according to the Web site. The first is mazao, or the crops, which are symbolic of the rewards given through productive and collective labor. Second is the mkeka, or mat, the foundation on which the African traditions and culture is built on. The candle holder, or kinara, is placed on the mat and is symbolic of the roots of African Americans. In each holder are the mishumaa saba, seven candles that each represent the seven principles of Kwanzaa that you can learn more about in the chart included. Muhindi is corn and represents the children and the future of the culture. The unity cup, also known as the kikombe cha umoja, is symbolic of unity to make everything possible.

Gifts known as zawadi are given to represent the love of parents and the commitments kept by their children. The presents are usually given to children and always include a book to stress learning and another item representing their heritage.

THINKING BACK AND AHEAD

The final day of Kwanzaa, Jan. 1, is called the Day of Meditation. This is even noted in the first harvest celebrations that the holiday derives from. In this, celebrators take a moment to dig deep into themselves and meditate. They think about who they are, if they are staying true to that and what they can do to improve themselves.

The last day can also be thought of as a day of remembrance, the colors of Kwanzaa also make one think about who they are and where they came from: black, red and green. They are used in tapestries, flags and other decorations, and each color is symbolic. Black is for the people, red for their struggle and green for the future.

NGUZO SABA

(The Seven Principles)



Umoja (Unity)

To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.



Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)

To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.



Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)

To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.



Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)

To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.



Nia (Purpose)

To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.



Kuumba (Creativity)

To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.



Imani (Faith)

To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

The Final Thought

Generations of Love

A few months ago, I would have laughed hysterically at the suggestion that I would ever drive halfway across the country with my two small children – and no other adult. I mean, what kind of insane person does that? Well, apparently, I do. When I heard that my 89-year-old grandfather had cancer in his esophagus, I knew that I had to go see him immediately, and since my husband couldn't escape from work, I loaded up my kids early on a Sunday morning and hit the road.

Thankfully, the trip wasn't as bad as I'd expected. Sure, it took us about 15 long hours to arrive at my parents' house in Houston, but the kids were good sports and I managed to keep my cool (well, most of the time). But in the week that we were there, I witnessed something spectacular: four generations of a family pulling together in a time of crisis.

Despite the fact that my parents, three siblings and I were all pitching in to take care of my grandparents, it still seemed as if we were outnumbered. This was partly because I'd brought my kids along, partly because almost everyone else had to work that week, and partly because my grandfather's rapidly deteriorating condition meant that he and my grandmother – still living in their own apartment – needed constant care and attention. So not only was I a "single parent" for the week, but when I brought my kids to visit my grandparents, I was single-handedly responsible for all four of them.

There was a lot of stress and tension that week: everyone was dealing with Grandpa's diagnosis and worrying about the future, helping my parents make arrangements for his medical care and for my grandmother's care in his absence. Everyone felt overwhelmed, drained and pulled in too many directions. And yet, like a well-made patchwork quilt made of different but equally beautiful pieces, our family held up to the wear and tear of my grandfather's illness.

My mother was obviously the most overwhelmed of all. This was her father, the man who had loved her every single day of her life. But she couldn't even stop to worry about losing him because she also had to worry about how my grandmother was coping, whether I needed help with my kids, communicating the news to the extended family, what she would do when her few hours of sick leave were gone, whether my grandfather's papers were in order, and where my grandmother would live after he was gone, since he had done so much to take care of her before he got sick so suddenly.

But amidst all of this anxiety, there was also my mother's joy when playing with her grandchildren, whom she hardly ever gets to see, which gave her a brief respite from her worries. There was the unexpected delight I felt when watching "The Price Is Right"



with my grandparents, which brought back memories of spending time with them as a child. There was the joy on my grandfather's face when my son gave him a picture that he'd drawn, as if it was a check for a million dollars. Indeed, all four generations were intertwined and interdependent, all caring for each other in our own ways, and all needing each other for something.

While it might have seemed to an outsider that my mom and I were doing most of the care-giving that week, that outsider might not have heard all the questions my children asked me about their Great-Grandpa, whom they barely remembered from our last visit nine months before, but whom they still loved deeply and felt great concern for. And that outsider also might not have noticed my grandfather's eyes moistening with tears when I said goodbye to him, not only because he knew he wouldn't see me again, but also because he was worried about our safety on the way home, and wishing he could do more for us. Even the youngest and oldest among us, those who were the most dependent, were doing their part to take care of the rest of the family.

My grandfather passed away less than two weeks after we returned from visiting him. I am so glad that I didn't wait to see him and I am so relieved that his suffering was short. I'm also grateful that I had an opportunity to take care of him one last time before he left this earth. When my

mother felt overwhelmed by everything, I reminded her that it is a blessing and a privilege to care for someone at the end of his life – to experience those last few weeks, days, or even those precious last minutes of his existence.

In the same way, it's a blessing and a privilege to care for those souls that have just arrived – our children. As Charles Dickens said, "It is no slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us." When I remember this, it changes my whole outlook on parenthood, because it reminds me that while I'm taking care of my children – dutifully wiping noses and tying shoes and emptying diaper pails – I'm also incredibly lucky to be the person who gets to take care of them. And they're not waiting until my old age to be my caregivers, either: with each spontaneous hug and kiss, and each sweet little gift of a drawing or a Play-Doh masterpiece, they are taking care of me today, too.





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Ms. Flanagan received her law degree (J.D.) with honors from **Creighton University School of Law** in 1995 and a Master in Law in Taxation (LLM) from the **University of Florida** in 2006. She has been a licensed attorney since 1995 and licensed in Florida since 2005. She is also a member of the Bar in California, Arizona, Nebraska and has assisted clients in all four states with their estate plans.

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