

CHRISTMAS GIFT BUYING SPECIALS

Sharing Christmas cheer employs some of Kentucky's jobless

TYNER, Ky. (AP) - Christmas season brings a special cheer each year to more than 100 unemployed people in the Appalachian foothills of Jackson County - a warm, happy feeling that comes from receiving a long-awaited paycheck.

The small army of jobless workers depends on the Christmas Ridge Handcrafts factory near the community of Tyner every year in late October. They man an assembly line until mid-December making thousands of natural pine and fir wreaths for shipment across the country.

"It gives them an opportunity to buy things at Christmas for their children and grandchildren that they might not otherwise have," says Carol Parrett, quality control chief at the factory, buildings, shipped about 51,000 wreaths in 1987, he says.

The income from the unemployment in the southern Kentucky county has hovered well above the 10 percent mark for most of 1988. He said about \$1 million the factory is projected to earn this year would go to support other CAP craft businesses.

Ms. Parrett says the wreath factory began more than 20 years ago, when about 10 haws and sons must travel 40 to 80 miles out of the mountains to find work in larger towns.

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Hollywood has mixed success when trying to market Christmas

HOLLYWOOD (AP) - The film world has long been fascinated with the yuletide season.

Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," the timeless tale of Scrooge and Tiny Tim, may well be the most recurrent of the Christmas movies. It appeared in several versions during the 1930s and '40s, then MGM made a 1938 "A Christmas Carol" with Reginald Owen as Scrooge. In 1951, the English did their own version with Albert Finney as the legendary penny-pincher the "Briar" had done in "Scrooge" in 1930.

Albert Finney was unrecognizable in the title role of the 1970 "Scrooge," and a recent version, starring George C. Scott, has become a television perennial. A couple of years ago, the Walt Disney company enlisted all of its cartoon stars for a featurette "Mickey's Christmas Carol."

The song "White Christmas," sung by Bing Crosby in the 1954 film, "Holiday Inn," became Irving Berlin's greatest hit and resulted in the 1954 movie, "White Christmas."

Frank Capra's unabashed sentiment often resulted in Christmas scenes, notably in "Meet John Doe" and "It's a Wonderful Life." The latter shows up regularly on holiday television.

Oddly, most films with "Christmas" in the title have fared poorly at the box office.

The "Christmas Tree," starring William Holden and Vera Lee, was a 1956 flop.

In 1944, Universal cast its biggest star, Deanna Durbin, in a film reminiscent of the holiday (1944), "Christmas in July," a same setting of the advertising industry by Preston Sturges' (1940), "Christmas in July," a song opera with Barbara Stanwyck and Dennis Morgan (1940).

Disney had little luck with "One Magic Christmas," a Capra-esque fantasy starring Mary Stuenkel and Harry Dean Stanton.

The producers of "Superman" thought they

would have another box-office bonanza with a big-budget "Santa Claus: The Movie," starring David Huddleston in the title role and Dudley Moore as chief elf. They thought wrong. The film was a turkey in 1985.

The most successful film about Christmas has been George Seaton's "Miracle on 34th Street," starring Edmund Gwenn as a department store Santa Claus who claims to be the real thing. The film, which also starred Maureen O'Hara, John Payne and young Natalie Wood, has become a television perennial and has now been colorized - much to the distress of purists.

Some other films featuring

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The Magic of Christmas touches young and old. For the very young, especially, Christmas is pure delight, as the lights, the music and the gifts create a magical moment. In this photo, the boy gets a hands-on experience of a 19th-century Christmas at Sweeney in Lancaster, N.Y. The boy is writer Washington Irving.

Santa chooses from thousands of new toys for festive season

Toys, toys, toys, toys, toys. Toys to the left of us, toys to the right of us.

Toys up this aisle and toys down that one.

Baubles, trinkets, play things, dolls, video games, board games, card games, construction games.

It's little wonder that Santa's beard is white.

The nation's retailers are excited to provide some 150,000 items to choose from this holiday season, with more than 5,000 of them new this year.

"Yet, caution seems to be the watchword for both customer and retailer," says Douglas Thompson, president of the Toy Manufacturers of America, a trade association.

Retailers are cautious, extremely slow in placing orders this year," he says, "and in the kinds of toys they order, too. They're taking fewer chances. Customers are more conservative, too."

Industry growth is seen as a little flat, as it was in 1986 and 1987, when sales were the same, \$12.5 billion.

Thomson sees this year as a continuation of the "cooling off and consolidation" time, still "quite good," but less successful than the 1983-1985 period of exceptional business that he says was caused by a sudden consumer interest in Cabbage Patch dolls, the Trivial Pursuit board game and Transformer toys.

He sees these trends in toys for this season:

- A continuing resurgence of popularity in video games, especially among young boys, and by extended-product-line area has had the biggest effect in sales and will continue, he says.
- Last year's home video game sales were estimated at more than \$1 billion.
- Board games will continue to be strong. Pictionary, from The Games Gang, has been a sales leader, he says, with nearly 10 million copies sold since it was introduced.
- "Back to basics" toys remain popular, like the "good play value" of Fisher-Price product, make-believe-type toys and "construction" toys, from Duplo and Lego and Tyco as well as Fisher-Price.
- On this theory that "everything old is new again," Creative Playthings is re-introducing some of its more popular outdoor wooden playgrounds and accessories.
- "All a child needs is one little bit of wood," says David Hesse, executive vice-president of Creative Playthings. "Children will be creative through their own imagination and that one block of wood will become anything that the child dreams of."

Expert says buy toys that spark imagination

Some of the worst toys for children are the expensive gimmicky spectator toys, such as talking dolls and bears because they do things as the child watches passively, according to Jack Lockhead of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

"Such toys squelch the child's imagination and limit play," explains Lockhead, director of the university's Center for Cognitive Research Processes.

The best toys, he says, are low-cost, low-tech toys that offer imaginative play - unpainted wooden blocks that help teach geometric patterns and mathematical concepts and the educational toys often found in schools.

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Holiday stress brings out the animal in shoppers

OXFORD, Ohio (AP) - The holiday season can bring out the worst in Christmas shoppers when it comes to irrational buying, according to a Miami University marketing expert.

"When we feel depressed by the season, it's not uncommon for us to go out and buy items we don't want or need, just to pick up our spirits," says Jack Clifford, chairman of the board of the university's marketing department.

Another holiday buying trend, he says, indicates shoppers also find it much easier to spend lots of money on several smaller items and avoid the one major ticket item.

For many busy families, according to another Miami University professor, stress is intensified during the yuletide season.

"Christmas is particularly stressful for two-income families attempting to balance the demands of jobs with personal expectations of family togetherness and holiday activities," says Timothy Brubaker, director of the university's Family and Child Studies Center.

"Addressing Christmas stress can be a major chore, with less baking and decorating cookies or entertaining, and the interruption in routines caused by school holidays adds to the tension," he says.

Brubaker, who edits "Family Relations," a journal of applied family and child studies published by the National Council on Family Relations, also believes holiday media images don't help with their portrayal of "traditional" families and career couples who are always at home.

Reality is much different, he says, noting that according to the 1987 census both mothers and fathers are employed in 37 percent of two-parent families with children 6 or under.

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