

THE OREGONIAN

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# A toy trunk of memories closing

**Gresham** | Toy Bear, known for its classic wares and its civic pride, will end its 24-year run

By **ERIC MORTENSON**  
THE OREGONIAN

GRESHAM — Toy Bear Ltd. was always more than just a toy store. It outfitted pirates and princesses, to be sure, but also civic pride. It stocked boosterism on the shelves next to the Brio.

Owners Pat and Dale Fiedler did more than sell dinosaurs and doctor kits, in other words. Not that they took a back seat in that category. For 24 years they offered the high-quality, colorful, spendy toys and games you'd expect to find in a downtown Portland store.

As a bonus, their store at Second

Street and Main Avenue had sales clerks who knew what they were talking about and offered free gift wrapping any time of the year. Many were the bewildered customers who arrived at the last minute, announced they needed something for a 5-year-old girl's birthday and walked out minutes later with a brightly wrapped present in hand.

The Fiedlers' community involvement didn't end at the close of a sale. Pat Fiedler, 60, in particular became a top-shelf community booster and volunteer. She founded the annual Teddy Bear Parade, served on the city's centennial celebration task force and in 2002 was named Citizen of the Year by the Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce and the East Metro Realtors.

She is a Centennial High School grad-

uate who never forgot where she came from. So when it came time to say she is closing the store, Fiedler delivered the news personally. Last week she and daughter Lorianne took letters to about 30 people around town, announcing that Toy Bear would close July 29. "Dear Friends," the letters began.

"We were fine until they hugged us," said Lorianne, 36, who manages the Gresham store. "Then we started crying."

The building owner recently increased the monthly rent 30 percent. Although they have a good relationship with the owner, the Fiedlers reluctantly concluded they couldn't absorb the additional expense.

The Gresham closure comes as the

Please see **TOY BEAR**, Page 5



## Toy Bear: Family hung on through state's economic bust

Continued from Page 1

Fiedlers are preparing to open a toy store called the Green Frog in Portland's upscale Pearl District this fall. They own another toy store, Child's Play, on fashionable Northwest 23rd Avenue in Portland.

But Gresham was always home, they said. Saying goodbye has brought "lots and lots of tears," Lorianne Fiedler said.

They opened the store in 1982, beginning in cramped quarters across the street from where they are now. Oregon slid into a severe recession at about the same time, but the family hung on.

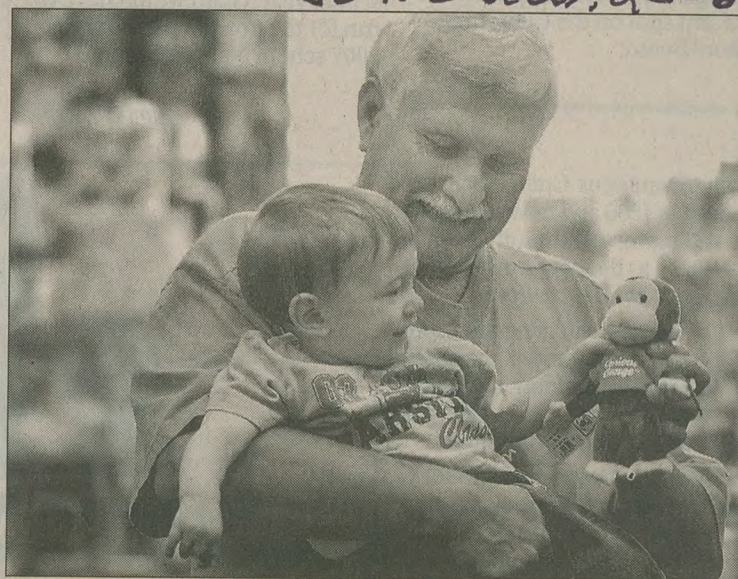
"In those days, we didn't know what we didn't know," Pat Fiedler said.

Dale, 65, had wanted to start a hardware store, but Pat talked him out of it, noting that she didn't know anything about hardware and wouldn't be much help. They agreed on a specialty toy store instead, drawing inspiration from a family favorite, Finnegan's in Portland.

"We chose downtown," Pat Fiedler said. "We knew we didn't want to be in a mall."

Community involvement was a given, she said, a result of her Catholic school education and repeated admonitions from nuns to perform "Good deeds, good deeds."

In the 24 years they've been in business, they've seen customers who were children when they started return to shop for their own children. They didn't carry realistic-looking toy guns or what they considered "fad" toys, sticking with largely unadorned classics



STEPHANIE YAO/THE OREGONIAN

**Steve Arn introduces his 10-month-old grandson, Braden, to Curious George during a trip last week to Toy Bear Ltd. The store has anchored historic downtown Gresham for 24 years, providing the type of high-quality toys, books and games that shoppers might find in downtown Portland. But the owners, who are opening a store in Portland's Pearl District, say they couldn't absorb a rent increase and are closing the Gresham location.**

such as Brio and Lego. The offerings range from Groovy Girl dolls to pedal cars to Cub Scout shirts, caps and emblems.

They've seen wide swings of the toy trend pendulum. Many toys these days have sound chips that emit complicated noises and dialogue, and many are tied to licensed characters ranging from Curious George to Batman. But the Fiedlers say they also sell an amazing number of old-fashioned jack-in-the-box toys.

"Customers appreciate that we stay with the classics," Pat Fiedler said.

Downtown business owners and boosters say the Toy Bear's closure is a tough blow.

"Anytime you have somebody who's been there 24 years, it affects your spirit and your mindset," said restaurant owner Shane Bemis, a member of the Gresham City Council and candidate for mayor. "Especially when it's people who haven't been just business owners but community champions for so long.

"The Toy Bear and the Teddy Bear Parade are almost synonymous. Anybody who has lived in Gresham any length of time has fond memories of the Teddy Bear Parade."

Bemis said he hopes the space will be filled by a retail outlet, not another restaurant or beauty salon.

The space won't remain vacant for long, said Kathy Everett, executive director of the Gresham Downtown Development Association.

"We have more investors and more people looking for opportunities here than we've ever had in the past," she said. "I'm very confident about that."

Which will ease the sting, some.

"We're going to miss the Toy Bear because they were great neighbors and leaders and partners in our community," Everett said.

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congratulations,  
from

# GRESHAM OUTLOOK



# Gresham to

*Strategy game has won many awards, can be learned in five minutes*

BY JILL FOREMAN  
staff writer

**T**his holiday season, board games are making a comeback as a way for all to reconnect in living rooms, around tables and away from the outside world.

Gobblet is one such board game that is escalating in popularity and can only be found at specialty stores such as Gresham's Toy Bear.

Gobblet is a fun strategy game that has won more than 10 best toy awards since it was introduced in 2001, including the prestigious Parents' Choice Foundation Award and Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Platinum Award.

"It's kind of similar to tic-tac-toe, but made for people who like chess," said Lorianne Fiedler, store manager of Toy Bear. "You could play it with a parent or with a child."

Toy Bear picked up the game among thousands of others at a toy fair in New York and debuted it last year at the front counter.

"It sold through as soon as people started playing it," Fiedler said.

## Getting into 'Gobblet'

A cross between the classics chess, tic-tac-toe and Sorry!

Object of the game: You must line up four of your pieces in a row to win.

Easy to learn:

- Taking turns, each player puts pieces on the board
- You can gobble up your opponent's smaller pieces
- The first player to line up four pieces in a row wins

According to maker Blue Orange Games, Gobblet has sold more than 30,000 boxes a year in some 1,500 specialty stores around the country.

Gobblet comes in a 10-by-10 inch wooden box and can be learned in about five minutes. Players compete to line up four of their pieces in a row, which is "gobbling" up an opponent's pieces by placing larger pieces over them.

"The game takes five minutes to learn, but as players get better at it, the game's nuances are revealed," wrote *San Francisco Chronicle* board game reviewer Mick LaSalle (he rated Gobblet No. 1).

Dale Fiedler of Toy Bear says Gobblet is a "social experience well-suited to our current fast pace of life and complex enough to remain fascinating game after



# store has coveted game



STAFF PHOTOS BY FLINT CARLTON

Lorianne Fiedler, left, store manager of Toy Bear in downtown Gresham, plays a game of Gobblet with Aidan Guthridge, on Friday, Dec. 12. Fiedler has been unofficially crowned the "Gobblet Guru" for her skill at the strategy game. According to Blue Orange Games, Gobblet has sold more than 30,000 boxes per year. Fans say it is well-suited to our fast-paced society and complex enough to keep your interest.

game."

Lorianne Fiedler has been unofficially crowned "Gobblet Guru" at Toy Bear, where customers and the curious can come in for a quick tutorial.

The toy store has a Gobblet Festival contest going where anyone who comes in to learn the

game and play a round gets a raffle ticket for a giant Gobblet set to be given away Sunday, Dec. 21.

"We have a father and son who come in frequently to play each other and get a ticket," Fiedler said. "Though now that they're so good the games have been taking

longer."

Fiedler said the average play time for a round of Gobblet is about 20 minutes.

"I also like that it comes in a contained wooden box," she said. "It can sit on a coffee table or be taken on a family trip in the car."

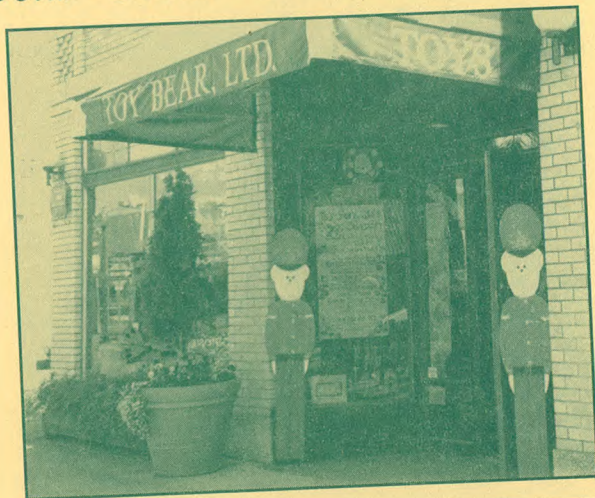
Gobblet costs \$30 for the adult version and \$20 for the junior game at Toy Bear, 130 N. Main Ave.

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