

# Toys on the Park celebrates 20-year anniversary

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Fred Rosenberg has been selling toys for a long time. Back in 1996, he opened Kingwood's Toys on the Park alongside his wife, Karen. Rosenberg attributes his store's longevity in an era of big-box stores to "good customers, good staff and a good community."

He describes visiting his store as an experience and said, "We sell everything from a good chocolate truffle to a rocket blast pad." The 5,000-square-foot store carries over 4,000 different items, not including an enormous selection of truffles, candy and soda. The 54 types of truffles sold in the shop come from Sweet Shop USA in Mount Pleasant, TX. Rosenberg has been buying them for over 20 years. He sells thousands of truffles each year, ordering 800-1,000 a month.

"I don't know of any other place in Texas that sells every single variety of truffle they make, but we do," said Rosenberg. The truffle is chocolate ganache in the center with different flavorings and quality melted chocolate on the outside. The truffles are kept in a climate-controlled case in the store, and the back stock is kept in a chocolate refrigerator.

The store also carries over 100 types of nostalgic sodas from around the country, and to celebrate the store's 20th anniversary this year, more than 20 different kinds of cotton candy, popcorn and fruit slices. The store stocks more than 600 kinds of candy – some are nostalgic and others are merely popular, with a huge selection of sour candy and Colorworks M&Ms in many popular school and college colors.

Beyond truffles, candy and soda, the store sells games, wood puzzles, Brictec building blocks, arts and crafts, Thomas the Tank Engine, rag dolls, Corolle dolls, and stuffed animals—everything from a stuffed crab to a 15-foot-tall Steiff giraffe made of mohair. The store also has a section devoted to tween girls and also to figurine animals ranging from unicorns to dragons.

"We have customers who come in weekly to buy the figurines. We have one customer, who is a painter, who has a huge collection

of thousands of figurines. He comes in whenever we get a new shipment," said Rosenberg.

Rosenberg said he likes to fill the shop with a wide variety of items: "We may not carry 100 of one thing, but we will have 25 of many things. We have a huge inventory. For a specialty toy store, we are very large. Usually stores like this are about 3,000 square feet." Rosenberg added that he really likes to buy from small companies, mom-and-pop shops that specialize and do a great job with what they make.



The store has a playroom in the back for kids. In a few weeks, the playroom will be occupied by Santa, who has been visiting the shop every weekend between Thanksgiving and Christmas for 20 years. How does he manage to get Santa to visit his shop? Rosenberg said he and Santa are old friends and that Santa loves coming to the shop because it's so hectic at that time of year in the North Pole, with all the elves working so furiously making toys for Christmas. For his part, Rosenberg says he feeds Santa's reindeer very well and cleans up after them.

Santa and the store team up to raise money for a good cause during his visits. For a \$10 donation, the shop takes digital photos of customers with Santa. Santa then uses the funds raised and works with local churches to find families in need. Santa delivers presents to those families on Christmas Eve, and oftentimes will also deliver other things the family needs, like money to fix a car or to pay a utility bill. All the toys from the donated money are purchased elsewhere, not at the shop, to avoid any conflict of interest. The shop raises

thousands of dollars each year. The Rosenbergs also donate gift certificates to many elementary school fundraisers all year long, but have no idea of the annual amount they give.

"I think charitable causes should be from the heart, not for the tax deduction," said Rosenberg.

The shop's staff of 10, including the Rosenbergs, aim to provide an exceptional experience to customers. Said Rosenberg, "Our staff is unique. For example, Riley, who works here, always wears suspenders and a bow tie and he owns a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig named Pablo. Riley says he aims to look like the candy store owner in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." He loves to make people smile and sings Disney songs, which he gets to do often and considers a chief perk of the job. "We attract great staff because we pay much better than the average retailer. Our staff tends to stay with us for a long time until they move to the next phase of their life. It's a fun place to work," he said.

Rosenberg noted that the store's prices are in line with other retailers, and even better when you look at what they have to offer their customers: great products, information, an Awesome Buck rebate program (customer receive a \$1 coupon for every \$10 spent), and free gift wrapping (which can typically cost \$3-\$7 elsewhere).

Looking to the future, the Rosenbergs hope to one day retire to Franklin, TN to live closer to their son, Scott, and three grandchildren, Claire, David and Charles. The Rosenbergs have been married for 48 years having met, as Fred tells it, "50 years ago July 2 at 2:35 p.m." They met at a beach north of Chicago, near Karen's hometown. She had just finished her first year of nursing school and saw Fred, who was horsing around and fell off a raft. He needed to go to the doctor to get a stitch and she went over to offer him ice.

Fred joked, "I went to the beach with my buddy and you know how these local girls try to swoop down, she picked me up. I was just a poor little injured city kid."

Toys on the Park is located at 1271 Kingwood Drive.



**OWNERS:**

*Fred and Karen Rosenberg*



**OPENED DOORS:**

**1996**

**FAVORITE QUOTE:**

*"Always do the right thing."*