

Television series opens its first store

Local company awarded for positive programming

BY MAXIM ALMENAS
Staff Writer

This year's hottest gift idea for the holidays may not be a shoot-em-up video game or a doll dressed in couture clothing. If Laura Wellington, head of the Fort Lee-based Giddy Gander Company has her way, the Wumblers, adorable little creatures born from

watermelons, will make their way into the hearts and homes of every child this holiday season.

The Wumblers have already made friends with millions of children across the globe through the television series of the same name, which airs on Time Warner, Sopras, Comcast and Cablevision television networks.

The Wumblers have opened their first retail store in Ridgewood, the Wumblers Patch, where children and their parents can adopt and name their favorite Wumbler, and help spread the underlying message of being socially responsible.

The National Parenting Center (NPC) awarded the Wumblers

their Seal of Approval award for the 2007 television series. The NPC's Seal of Approval program identifies the finest products and services being marketed to children.

"We have to mentor leaders from the ground up," said Wellington. "We also have to teach children to be globally and environmentally responsible."

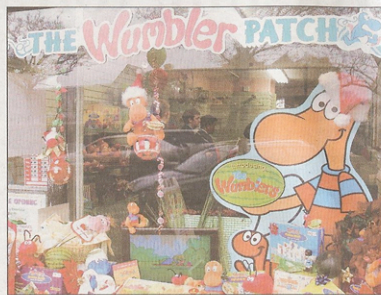
In the show, Bertrum, the main Wumbler, and his bi-lingual best friend, Raimundo, a fast, wise snail, engage in conversations that address diversity and spiritualism in a manner that children can relate to, and parents can appreciate.

"The show breaks down language barriers and advocates bi-lingual fluency," Wellington said. "Let's get a broader view. That's what we should advocate."

Wellington is not shy about calling out other children's television networks that place too much emphasis on violence and merchandising, and less on programming with a positive message. Wellington draws a parallel of irresponsibility within the entertainment industry and the financial sector, which sends the wrong message to tomorrow's leaders.

"So many CEOs trash companies and leave clients with no market place," Wellington said. "Where's the responsibility?"

Wellington also launched the Season of Giving program, designed to thank Ridgewood



STAFF PHOTO BY MAXIM ALMENAS

A Fort Lee-based educational television series opened a store called The Wumbler's Patch recently at 11 Oak St., Ridgewood.

children and their schools for helping to create the Wumblers. The community-wide contest allows Ridgewood children to vote for their favorite school. The school that garners the most votes by the end of the season wins a percentage of the store's profits, which the school can then apply toward educational needs.

"The program teaches kids the value of giving," Wellington said. The store also doubles as a classroom during school trips when children take part in the Make the World a Better Place program. Children have the opportunity to play games and draw in a colorful and comfortable environment.

Last season, some children witnessed their artwork come to life when some of the drawings submitted into a Wumbler art competition made it into the television and DVD series.

As for the future, Giddy Gander is launching a new book series incorporating activity, picture and sound books in English and Spanish, made possible through an exclusive publishing partnership with Mackinac Island Press. And drawing upon the importance of playing, Wellington hopes to build Wumbler-themed parks one day.

Growing up in an era when family value and education oriented shows such as Mr. Roger's Neighborhood and Sesame Street were the main source of programming for children, Wellington believes Wumblers can help fill a void today.

"We have to bring back good messages for children and merge them with reality," Wellington said.

For more information go to www.wumblers.com

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