

THE BRYAN TIMES

News

Ohio Art's newest toys turning heads

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Published:
Friday, March 4, 2011 1:13 AM EST

Print Page

Imagine building a model of the Taj Mahal with tiny building blocks. Or strumming an imaginary air guitar with a plastic pick - and making real music.

These are just two of the toys the Ohio Art Co. introduced at the February 2011 American International Toy Fair in New York.

Other new offerings from the Bryan toy company are Clics, Grafix puzzles and Dinosaur Train.

Martin Killgallon, senior vice president of marketing and product development, explained and demonstrated the new toys in a conference room tucked inside the Ohio Art office building.



Martin Killgallon, senior vice president of marketing and development with Ohio Art Co., is standing in the company's booth at the American International Toy Fair in New York. Ohio Art introduced several new toys at the fair. (Photo courtesy of Ohio Art)

He picked up a toy giraffe made of micro-sized building blocks called nanoblock®, which Killgallon said is "one of the fastest-growing construction brands (of toy) in Japan." Ohio Art is the sole distributor of nanoblock in the United States.

A look at what you can make with nanoblock shows why this toy is so popular. The tiny blocks allow for amazing detail that makes the finished toy seem more like a model than a typical building-block toy. Killgallon said nanoblock made its U.S. debut in February at FAO Schwarz and will be available this spring at Toys R Us and other specialty toy and book stores.

Each package of nanoblock makes a particular figure. The "Sites to See Series" relates to geographical locations such as the Taj Mahal (India), Neuschwanstein Castle (Germany - over 550 pieces) and the Eiffel Tower (France). The "Mini Series" includes a giant panda, koala bear (over 150 pieces), giraffe, pink pig, tree frog and white terrier. Amazingly, each assembled toy fits in the palm of your hand.

Another stunner is Air Picks. Killgallon said this toy is made by Ohio Art and will be available later this year at stores yet to be determined.

"It's the ultimate air guitar," said Killgallon.

The roughly heart-shaped picks actually produce songs.

"They've taken the top guitar riffs and combined them so you can instantly identify the songs ... they play notes in sequence with each strum," said Killgallon.

The Rolling Stone Air Picks play "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Paint It Black" - all iconic Stones hits.

The Rebel Rock selection plays "Sweet Home Alabama," "Born to Be Wild" and "Mississippi Queen."

Classic Rock plays ""What I Like About You," "Smoke on the Water" and "Wild Thing."

"The music rights were difficult to get because you're not dealing with the bands," said Killgallon. "You have to work with the publishers."

After the rights to the music were secured, Killgallon said he began searching for someone to handle the recordings and burn them onto chips.

While investigating groups in New York and Chicago, Killgallon said he heard about a local man who does this type of work - Barry Leitch of Bryan.

"He's got a recording studio in his home," Killgallon explained.

Both nanoblock and Air Picks were featured in the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association's publication "Share the Fair."

Killgallon said ASTRA retailers scoured the toy fair every day to report on "hot" toy prospects and that it is an honor to have a toy singled out in "Share the Fair."

"And we had two," Killgallon said.

Jason Potinsky, Ohio Art's director of product development, created Doodle Sketch Giggle Bellies, which are available online and at Target. These toys giggle as you draw on their "bellies," retail for \$7.99 and are recommended for ages 3 and up. Dinosaur Train is another new Doodle Sketch drawing toy.

Killgallon said Ohio Art is the U.S. distributor for Grafix puzzles, which are made in the United Kingdom. They are packaged in a box with a cord handle that sports a puzzle piece consumers can see and feel to realize the quality of the toy.

And for those who like bling, this writer got a sneak peek at two Swarovski crystal-encrusted Etch A Sketches still in the development state. Talk about wow power. Killgallon noted the small one would make a fabulous brooch - and no one could argue with that. Ladies, keep your eyes peeled. This one could be worth the wait.

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