

HOT SPOT

By Art Snyder

Fun and profits are in the air, with everything from Halloween to Christmas and New Year's Day generating loads of opportunity. The holiday toy parade looks very promising, on many rink fronts, for your younger customers. Zombies are on the loose, too, as they're the major cultural theme going into next year with your teen and older skaters. Note that the abundance of toys and zombie-themed games, movies and TV shows can help you jack up your rink décor this year with powerful, colorful and eye-catching graphics. Plus, on the tummy level, the humble potato gets its due with a couple of new approaches to America's favorite vegetable. And, your active customers are going to like what Gatorade has for them. Details are below.

Year of the zombie

With a load of new video, handheld and related computer games, as well as Hollywood blockbusters like *World War Z* and *This Is the End*, as well as top-rated TV series like *The Walking Dead* and *Zombieland*, you can say that zombies are taking over teens and tweens this year. In the print realm, moreover, Archie Comics has an upcoming zombie story line for pre-teens and older.

And if that weren't enough, the current mud-run fitness craze has

attracted fans who identify with zombie life as they compete in events across the United States. Among the zombie-fitness activities are *Run For Your Lives* and *The Zombie Run*; both are race events held on various dates in several locales across the country.

As a rink operator, you might

get your staff together to develop new zombie-skating fitness sessions or mini-marathons that should succeed on several levels and garner lots of favorable publicity for your rink. Skaters can hit the floor as chaser zombies (skating fast) or stumbler zombies (skating herky-jerky style) and have a whale of a time dressed in their favorite raggedy zombie costumes.

Underscoring this "trend of the undead," the premier summer trade show for game enthusiasts saw this "zombification" through several new games and sequels (see the segment below for more). Be sure to tap into the zombie world in your rink's game area and redemption center during the weeks

and months ahead — from Halloween to New Year's sessions and into winter — and start your zombie planning to have a frightfully great year.

Need ideas? Go to <http://x.co/1UZ6h> for loads of enjoyable, money-making suggestions.

Hordes of zombie games

This year's E3 game convention in Los Angeles — an annual, trend-setting event — saw the clear, enthusiastic dominance of zombies, and that's good news for your rink game and redemption areas. Look for any zombie-themed game or licensed products that you believe your rink customers will shout about.

Among the upcoming games showcased at E3: *Dead Rising 3*; *ZombiePox*; *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare*; *Dying Light*; *The Evil Within*; *The Walking Dead: 400 Days*; *DayZ*; *Plants vs. Zombies 2*; *Zombies, Run!*; and *Ray's the Dead*. And if you've had success with zombie games that have been out awhile, such as *State of Decay*, look for sequels and updates that'll keep your off-floor customers happy.



with toy add-ons, or tweak birthday party themes to key on any number of exciting toys and related licensed goodies.

The projected biggies for this season and 2014: Playskool Sesame Street Big Hugs Elmo (yes, Elmo characters and the brand remain a big draw with the very young); *Despicable Me 2* characters; Disney's Doc McStuffins; *Flutterbye Flying Fairy*; *Skylanders SWAP Force*; *The Ugglys Pug Electronic Pet*; *FurReal Friends Cuddles My Giggly Monkey Pet*; *Furby Boom* and other Furby characters; *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (a perennial winner with boys), *Zoomer RoboDog* pet; *Justice League Javelin Ship* and the seven Justice League members; *Melissa and Doug*; *Angry Birds Star Wars* characters; and a host of dolls. Among the favored dolls in the months ahead are *Barbie* (still!); *Sofia*; *Baby Alive*; and *Monster High Power Ghouls Frankie Doll*.

Be sure to check your area toy stores for rink-ready toy ideas, and consult your younger staff and any staffers who have children. Their feedback will be invaluable, and it could spark lots of solid retailing ideas to put into gear at your rink.

In the news with Gatorade G Series and Ruffles Crispy Fries



Hot toys for 2013 holiday season

Toys can be the backbone of many of your rink's profit centers, so no matter what your age, you need to stay current with what's hot in the land of toys. Major retailers like Target, Walmart, Amazon and Toys R Us have announced their predictions for the top toys for 2013-14, so do your homework to see how these branded toys might put money in your rink's pocket.

This encompasses redemption fare and prizes for school and other child-centered session drawings, as well as your game and vending areas. Remember to revise and update birthday parties

Grand Theft Auto V sets sales record

In a word: Wow! That's the response to the debut of the latest installment of *Grand Theft Auto*. Called *Grand Theft Auto V*, it was one of the most-anticipated video games of the year, and sold more than \$1 billion in just two days after introduction several weeks ago.

The original *Grand Theft Auto* made its debut 16 years ago, and, clearly, this game remains a force with youth (and a number of players beyond the targeted under-25 age group). Be sure to look for anything connected to Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto*

