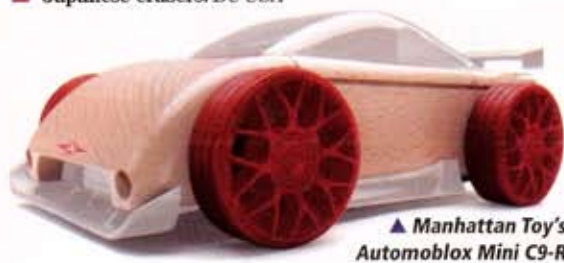


# Windy City Winners

## Chicago

### Building Blocks Toy Store

- Automoblox Mini cars. *Manhattan Toy*
- Thomas Wooden Railway. *Learning Curve*
- Kids On Stage. *University Games*
- Rush Hour. *ThinkFun*
- Sticky Mosaics Jewelry Box. *The Orb Factory*
- Create Your Own Pop-Up Books. *Creativity For Kids*
- Puzzles. *Ravensburger and Melissa & Doug*
- Sleep Sheep. *Cloud B*
- Doinkit Darts. *Marky Sparky*
- Japanese erasers. *BC USA*



▲ Manhattan Toy's Automoblox Mini C9-R

"We're a high-quality alternative to Toys R Us and Target," said Andrew Wade of Chicago's Building Blocks Toy Store, a specialty toy retailer with locations in the city's Lakeview and Wicker Park neighborhoods.

The stores' selection, Wade, the manager of the Lakeview shop, told *PLAYTHINGS*, is "a hodgepodge of educational toys," but it's best known for Thomas trains. "Everyone in the city comes to us because at any time we have everything they offer," Wade said. "We also have the largest selection of Bruder in the area." The Lakeview store, Wade added, is also well known for its "wall of games."

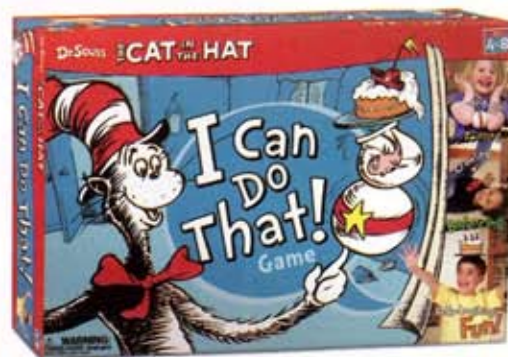
## Downers Grove and Elmhurst, Ill.

### My Favorite Toy Store!!

- Japanese erasers. *BC USA*
- Gogo's Crazybones. *iToys*
- Snap Caps. *M3 Girl Designs*
- Magna-Tiles. *Valtech*
- Uglydoll and Lubbies plush. *Pretty Ugly and Rocket USA*
- Sticky Mosaics. *The Orb Factory*
- Construction toys. *Various manufacturers*
- Perplexus. *PlaSmart*
- Sophie the Giraffe. *Vulli*
- Bananagrams. *Bananagrams*

"We started small but wanted to have a wide variety of products for all ages," said Emily Bieritz, buyer, for the two May Favorite Toy Store!! Shops in Chicago's northwest suburbs. "We say we carry the newest, coolest and best toys for any age."

So far, 2010's been "really good. We were up about 30 percent in January compared to last year—although last January was horrible so it wasn't a hard month to beat," Bieritz told *PLAYTHINGS* in late February. The post-holiday success for the two-store operation followed a "phenomenal" Christmas season, one in which the retailer "really tried to bring in new and different product for the holidays...stuff that was unique and that our customers hadn't seen before." January's subsequent sales jump was attributed to a more aggressive effort to restock the stores than had been done traditionally. Also drawing winter traffic were promotions like "Super Saturdays," during which kids can gather to trade their Crazybones with each other as well as from the store's collection.



▲ The Cat In The Hat – I Can Do That! Game

## Chicago

### Cat & Mouse Game Store

- The Settlers of Catan. *Mayfair Games*
- Dominion. *Rio Grande Games*
- Fits. *Ravensburger*
- Bananagrams. *Bananagrams*
- Carcassonne. *Rio Grande Games*
- Dungeon Lord. *Z-Man Games*
- Gobblet Gobblers. *Blue Orange Games*
- Go Away Monster! *Gamewright*
- The Suitcase Detectives. *Haba*
- The Cat In The Hat – I Can Do That Game.

*I Can Do That! Games*

"We're primarily a game store," Cat & Mouse Game Store owner Linda Schmidt told *PLAYTHINGS* in late February. "Plus we carry a few toys—impulse toys or things like stacking toys for young kids—and lots of jigsaw puzzles and brain teasers." The year-and-a-half year old shop, which Schmidt said was inspired by "the need for a career change," was launched by people who "really, really like board games and puzzles" just as the bottom of the economy fell out in September of 2008. "Things have been going well, despite our horrible timing," Schmidt said. The store's selection is a mix of adult strategy games alongside children's, family and party games.

A "big role" in the store's success, Schmidt said, are efforts that get customers through the door, like a "huge" demo game collection and tournaments.