

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

At expo, all's fair in fun and games

twice. Jason Feinberg said his company's name stood for the "metaphorical prison" of working for other people. Asked for his title, he replied, "I guess I'd be president, but I don't like the word president."

Most inventors and companies at the toy fair were less conflicted. Modesty was as scarce as a dollar cup of coffee inside the Javits Center. At least a dozen manufacturers advertised the "hottest" new toy of 2008. According to Toys & Family Entertainment magazine, the best-selling toys include Fisher-Price's Kid Tough Digital Camera, the Playmobil Jet Plane, Transformers Ultimate Bumblebee, Rubik's Cube, California Creations' Flying Monkeys, and the Marshmallow Shooter, from the Marshmallow Fun Co., among others. And anything with "Hannah Montana" in its name.

Two trends for 2008: Eco-friendly toys made of recyclable materials, and products that teach children about different cultures.

"A lot of the ethnic dolls on the market are not authentic," Dave Davis said. "They take a Caucasian skull and just change the color."

Davis is chief technology officer at KidsGive, makers of Karito Kids, a line of "ethnically accurate" dolls and books. KidsGive, according to Davis, pored over "thousands" of photos before settling on accurate representations of people



Former cosmetics industry executive Beverley Danusis is founder of SophiaDolls, collectible-quality dolls that "honor the unique sizes and features of real women" and are modeled after Greek goddesses.

from China, Kenya, Italy, Mexico and other countries for its 21-inch dolls.

If the toy fair is any indication, kids don't have to be plugged in to have fun. Judy Folkmanis, who started selling puppets on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, Calif., 30 years ago, now heads up the world's leading manufacturer of plush puppets. The company hired freelance puppeteers to demonstrate some of its 200-plus puppets at the toy fair.

At one booth, Beverley Danusis showed off her line of plus-size SophiaDolls, the first dolls "to honor the unique sizes and features of real women," according to the former cosmetics industry executive.

Searching for a Uzbekistan Airways keychain? Daron, based in Fairfield, is not only the world's largest supplier of commercial aviation toys and models but the official licensee of toys for the City of New York. Lewis Polk, president of Irvington-based Polk's Model Craft Hobbies, talked about the Polk family's former hobby store in downtown Newark and the company's line of G-gauge indoor/outdoor trains.

Only at the toy fair could a welder and a former world skipping-stones champion be found. Wait, they're the same guy.

"This is the closest thing yet to a magic carpet ride," welder-turned-inventor Allen Humphrey said of his Go-Kid carts.

Lego, celebrating the 50th anniversary of its first brick, introduced



The MRSA virus becomes a stuffed toy thanks to GIANTmicrobes, a line of plush toys based on microbial nasties.

a line of "Star Wars: The Clone Wars" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" merchandise, hoping to cash in on two of this year's projected movie blockbusters.

But the coolest of Lego's new products may have been its 953-piece police headquarters set, complete with secret passage walls, handcuff holders and jail cell toilets.

Many of the back stories were as interesting as the toys themselves. Gordon Haas ditched a job as a wire and cable seller to develop his line of SquashBlox construction cushions, which kids use to make buildings complete with windows and tunnels. Diagnosed with cancer in 2003, Haas put his Hoboken-based company and dreams on hold. The cancer now in remission, Haas formed a new company, Daydream Toy, in 2006.

"We definitely stay away from electronic toys," said his wife. Mon-

ique Haas. "We want kids to use their imagination, have fun in a classic, pure way. Being an independent toy maker is tough, but specialty toy stores are always looking for creative products."

Aimee Symington raided "my kids' education fund, our retirement savings and our available income" to develop Blunders, the only board game that teaches manners in a fun way, according to Symington, a children's etiquette instructor from Davidson, N.C.

Linda Stortz might have had the toy fair's toughest job — trying to convince buyers that stomach aches, staph, red tide, bed bugs and plain old scum could be fun. Stortz is a spokesperson for GIANTmicrobes, a line of plush toys based on microbial nasties.

"We have viruses today," she said cheerfully. "GIANTmicrobes have become a cult item in Canada. They're the rage among goth teenagers."