

Building the perfect playplace for the kids



By Leslie Everton Brice
FOR THE LEDGER-NEWS

Backyard play sets have come a long way from the basic swings and metal slides that scorched your skin on hot summer days. And what better way to keep tabs on your kids than to build them their own little kingdom out back?

"With more and more stuff going on out there in the world, the more moms really want their kids to play in their own backyard," said Jeff Robertson, owner and founder of Canton-based PlayNation. "We try to encompass (in the play sets) everything mom and dad and the kids could want."

PlayNation manufactures its play sets in its Canton plant, for distribution to retail stores all over the country. It also sells play sets through its Web site: www.playnation.com.

The company recently opened a brand new showroom and retail center in Marietta — and it's a hard sell to walk out of there if you've got kids in tow. You may even want to test the equipment out yourself — go ahead. It's allowed and even encouraged here.

The Marietta showroom is the only one that PlayNation runs under its own flag. "Our business, nationally and internationally, is primarily wholesale, to other retailers," said Robertson. "But Atlanta has always been our lifeblood and our best

market. It's our home, and it makes sense to have (a retail showroom) here."

PlayNation's prices are aimed for the medium-price market, Robertson said. "Not much in the medium-priced market was being sold here," he said. PlayNation started out as a local company. By its third year, it went national. "The product just took off," said Robertson.

A stroll around the PlayNation showroom gives a good sampling of the company's most popular play sets: you can choose one of the models, or create a combination of your own — as elaborate or simple as you like. You can start out small and add on, or go for the whole thing at once.

And the array of choice is dizzying: Two- and three-story towers with play houses; swings; rope ladders; rock climbing walls; trapezes; corkscrew climbers and fireman's poles; slides of all varieties — even built-in picnic tables, and a whole lot more. It's a paradise for a kid, and a blessing for parents who are running out of options when their kids moan, "I'm bored, what can I do?"

Robertson, a father himself, designs and builds play sets that are sturdy and safe, he says. "I wouldn't sell something that I wouldn't let my own kids play on," he said.

See Playsets, Page 20

Creative Kitchens is at 180 Parkway's 2 C-130, Woodstock, phone (770) 924-4130 on the Web, www.Creative-Kitchens.com

Woodstock business Dreamtime Designs is a place for parents to go find the perfect playset for their children. Dreamtime Designs is located at 10787 Ga. 92 Woodstock. It's open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For information call (770) 516-1554 or go to www.dreamtimedesigns.net.

• Critics: 20
• Real estate agents: 1,200
• 2005 sales: 9,400 closings; \$3.6 billion in value

PLAY SET

From Page 7

Brian Pound, co-owner of Dreamtime Designs in Woodstock, started out his business when he was simply shopping for an affordable, well-built back yard play set for his kids. Was that so much to ask? "I started shopping around, and I was shocked at the prices," Pound said. So he decided he'd build a play set himself, and his kids were pleased with the result. Soon neighbors and friends noticed the back yard wonderland. Word spread. People started asking Pound to build play sets for

their kids. And that's how Dreamtime Designs got started.

"We did extensive research," said Pound, who co-owns the company, with business partner Kate Clark. "We decided we don't necessarily want to be a huge company, why not build heavier and better-built play sets?" Dreamtime specializes in custom-designed play sets.

"That's what got us started," said Pound. Dreamtime Designs is located in a building that used to be a house—and in the front yard of that house is a child's fantasy land of fun. Forts, bridges, slides, swings, arbors,

plathouses and more.

Both Dreamtime and PlayNation build equipment that can be adapted or added to as a child grows older.

"Many people buy them for their kids that are not even a year old," said Pound. Play sets can be built with safety railings that can be removed as the child gets older, said Pound.

And you can always add features.

"A lot of times people ree!l the sets after their kids are grown," Pound said. "And they're moveable—I even lend people my tools!"

Sometimes, the play sets have even been

used as bargaining chips.

"They're a selling point for people selling their home," said Clark. "Sometimes the buyers insist that the play sets be left with the house."

And you don't have to be a kid to love to play.

"A lot of people, especially men, say 'this is as much for me as for my kids,'" Pound said. "And we sure have a lot of fun when we build them."

For more information about Dreamtime Designs call (770) 516-1554 or visit www.dreamtimedesigns.net. Call PlayNation at (770) 424-7779 or go to www.playnation.com.