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Collegiate Toyland

by Jane Steele

Technical Journalism Senior



Most of us thought we were too old for toys long before we reached college age, but Chev Adams, president of the Collegiate Manufacturing Company, Ames, Iowa, has proved us wrong. The company, the only one of its kind in the country, specializes in the manufacture of college animals, mascots, pennants and other novelties, primarily for sale to college students.

Originally the company was the novelty division of the Tilden Manufacturing Company, also located in Ames. It became a company in its own right in the 1930's. Adams originated and developed the idea of making college animals to promote and take advantage of college spirit.

When the toys first came out, the designs were poor and were made in school colors only. The sale of the animals was strictly seasonal leaving the plant idle for the three-month vacation period each year while awaiting orders. Today the toys are made primarily in natural colors, and the market for them is year round.

How and who

How does a novelty animal come into existence? Let's take four-year-old Cheer-up for an example. Cheer-up is the sad-eyed dog, tan in color, who looks the picture of dejection. The "Super-Drooper of Dogdom" made for general sale throughout the country reached the 50,000 sale mark for college students alone.

Cheer-up, who was created by company artist George Grooms, was the first animal to be made in the natural color. In this case tan felt was used, but previously all animals had been made in school colors only. Since the animal's character is found mainly in the pattern, the stuffing must be firm. Collegiate has found that ground cork answers this purpose best. Also included in the Cheer-up family are three new members—Perky, Peppy and Patty, the puppies.

New sensation in the stuffed novelty field is Poco, the constant companion of Xavier Cugat, the rumba king. When Cugat asked Collegiate to make his "leettle" Chiwawa last year, Poco resulted. A 16 page booklet, illustrated by Cugat, tells the Chiwawa's story. Poco has a nation-wide reputation, for he has appeared on radio and television in an extensive promotion program.

Designed with an eye to authentic breed lines and coloring, are the new Pedigreed Pups. Included in the group are Pom Pom, the Poodle, made of grey suede-

cloth with "poodle plush"; Cindy, the black cocker, glossy black and cuddly in a plush material; pugnacious and aggressive looking Bobby, the Boxer. Others among the series are Sport, the pointer; Maxie, the Dachshund; Bobo, the St. Bernard—until the family of Pedigreed Pups numbers 14. The pups are particularly popular with the younger generation for which Collegiate is doing some manufacturing now.

Company staff

The Collegiate Manufacturing Company employs a day staff of one hundred people and a night shift of fifty. Everything from the designing of the animals to the stuffing, painting, to sewing on the button nose is done in the building located at 5th and Douglas in downtown Ames.

One of the first steps after the design is perfected is the making of a paper pattern from which the toy is cut. Then comes the sewing of the parts, the stuffing and firmly tapping in the cork. Next the ears and tail are sewed on by hand. Wiring the eyes and nose into the animal is the final step. The coloring of the animals is achieved by using dyed felt.

The company maintains a large sales staff throughout the United States. The toys are sold to college, university, military academy and private school students in every college community.

Children's toys

Only recently have these designs been made for sale as children's toys. These toys were first exhibited at the Toy Fair in New York City last March.

With this new audience certain changes have been made in the construction of the animals. For the small fry the company securely sews the removable parts, thus eliminating the sharp points of wire.

Since small children are addicted to putting things in their mouths, non-toxic, permanent textile dyes are used to replace water colors. Before this time little attention was paid to the type of dye used.

More "cuddly" materials, softer and fuzzier than the firmer felt, are used in the new lines of animals. For example new materials are used in the Pedigreed Pup line.

Now in its 22nd year of novelty animal manufacture, the Collegiate Manufacturing Company has found an ever-widening audience for its novelties and a definite market in toys for college students and for children.