

Come on Barbie, let's go party!

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
Friday, 22 December 2023 00:00



OFPL hosts party, exhibit to honor iconic doll

For over 60 years, Barbie has been a part of pop culture and history. From toy sales to movies, to video games and TV series, the top-selling doll paved the way for Mattel to grow into a \$6.81 billion company.

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Ruth Handler created Barbie in 1959 after watching her daughter Barbara play with paper dolls. At the time, most children's toy dolls were representations of infants. Handler came up with the idea of an adult-bodied doll, and thus Barbie was born.

Flash forward to 2023, and the doll is still being celebrated today. With the *Barbie* movie starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling releasing this past summer, Mattel has seen a massive increase in profit, calculating a \$125 million revenue boost, according to Forbes.

But people aren't done celebrating the iconic doll or the movie just yet. The Octavia Fellin Public Library currently has a Barbie exhibit on display, which allows patrons to learn more about Handler and the history of the famous doll. Part of the exhibit features Barbies from different decades.

DOLLS ON DISPLAY

Noah Begay, one of the library's clerks, helped bring the exhibit together by donating all of his personal dolls. All the dolls featured in the exhibit were donated by Begay. He began collecting Barbies during the pandemic. In an interview with the *Sun*, he explained how he started collecting the dolls.

"It was really a great time to collect vintage Barbies because the prices were really good. A lot of the time older Barbies go for so much money, so at that time it was really cool to be able to start a collection like that because I couldn't afford it [otherwise]," he said.

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Begay donated every Barbie from his collection to the library's exhibit. He said his aim was to get dolls from every decade of Barbie.

While the first Barbie ever made is a little bit past Begay's budget – an original Barbie from 1959 is going for just over \$27,000 on eBay — he did include a doll from the early 1960s: the #6 Ponytail Barbie. This doll is considered one of the original Barbies and features a signature ponytail hairstyle.

The Malibu Barbie on display is from 1972. For the first time ever, the doll's eyes are facing forward instead of to the side. This change lines up almost exactly with the 1972 passage of Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs.

The 1980s Barbie on display is the Rocker Barbie, with feathers in her hair, pink tights, and a shiny silver top and skirt combo.

The Barbie from the '90s is the Totally Hair Barbie, with long wavy hair that goes down to the doll's ankles.

"It was important to me to get a doll from every decade because I want everybody who comes in to reflect on the times they ever had a Barbie or had a memory of Barbie," Begay said. "Someone might come in here and say 'Oh, I remember seeing that on the shelf in the store' or 'I had this doll growing up.'"

He said his favorite doll from his collection is a 1971 live-action Barbie that is dressed like a hippie with a headband, psychedelic puffy pants, a puffy top, and fringe tassels. That doll came out two years after Woodstock.

"What's neat about her is when she came out in 1971, they released her with a stand so when you put the doll on the stand and you move it, it makes it look like she's dancing, and her fringe tassels sway and she just looks so cool," Begay said. "... I think that 1971 live-action Barbie for me really shows how far she's come, and I think it's important because it shows how kids' taste change and how toys reflect that."

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From a fashion designer to an astronaut, and the more modern game developer and entrepreneur Barbies, the doll really has had almost every job under the sun.

“That’s the thing that I love about Barbie is that she really tried to go through the decades, keeping up with the latest trends and keeping up with the younger demographic,” Begay said.

GROWING UP WITH BARBIE

Begay grew up with two sisters who both were over 10 years older than him. While his sisters were not into Barbies — they were Bratz girls — Begay found Barbie on his own. He said he would often go into a store as a kid and find the Barbies and just marvel at how pretty the dolls looked.

“Growing up as a kid in Gallup, New Mexico, especially knowing that I was different [because I was gay,] it was always intriguing for me to see Barbie in stores because she stood for everything I wanted to be and that I liked, but I didn’t understand at that time,” he explained. “As a young boy we’re supposed to be into the color blue and we’re supposed to like action figures things like that. Growing up I was sort of the opposite of that even at a young age.”

As the younger sibling, Begay would often watch his sisters get ready for the day. This was his first introduction the idea of femininity.

“I’d say growing up with my two older sisters they definitely introduced me to that side of femininity that I looked up to. I looked up to my sisters, I thought they were glamorous. I used

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to always see them getting ready and teasing their hair and doing their makeup and I always used to think ‘Wow, that is so cool,’” he said.

Begay didn't get his Barbie until he was about 8 years old in 2009.

“I didn't get to have [Barbies] growing up at first just because I think that my family at the time was definitely just starting to get to know me as a young kid, so I think they just wanted to see where I was headed, so they kind of kept me away from those things, not for long, but I know that later on thankfully my parents were very accepting of me,” he said.

THE BARBIE PARTY

OFPL doesn't just have the exhibit though. For people who wanted an extra Barbie fix, the library held a Barbie party on Dec. 16 that featured pink cowboy hats, sunglasses, and handkerchiefs that people could decorate.

Similar to the movie theaters that showed the *Barbie* movie, the library also had a life-sized Barbie box that people could pose for pictures in.

Kids and adults alike watched the *Barbie* movie and snacked on pink cupcakes that featured a topper made from the library's 3D printer.

OFPL's Deputy Director Betty Martin said she wanted to create the exhibit and host the party to honor Barbie's legend.

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“I just wanted to show that Barbie is not just a doll. She’s an inspiration. She’s an icon. She encourages a lot of imagination, a lot of play. ... [E]verybody’s included. And she kind of lets us all know we can do whatever we want to do,” she said.

The Barbie exhibit will be on display at OFPL until the end of January.

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