

# The 2006 Parent

by DAN BORTOLOTTI

## GIRLIES VS. GRRRLZ

Heading into 2006, it seems entrepreneurs aren't sure whether they should counter girlie stereotypes or exploit them. Take, for example, two newly opened Canadian businesses. Toronto-based Girls are... (girlsare.ca) specializes in T-shirts with messages such as "Girls are... Smart" and "Girls are... Proud." Meanwhile, nearby Leelee's Tiara (leeleestiara.com) offers "make your own bubble bath" birthday parties and makeovers that will turn your smart and proud daughter into a fairy princess. Now wouldn't this make an interesting merger?

## A cellphone for every member of the family

Teens went wireless years ago, then in August, Rogers Wireless (owned by the same company as *Today's Parent*) introduced Firefly Mobile phones, aimed at kids eight to 12. Next up: Rover. PetsMobility Network of Vancouver is promising cellphones for dogs — shaped like a bone that hangs from the collar and lets you bark commands (and hear barks) without actually being there. Can you hold? I have Fluffy on line two.



## Diapers — now with improved fragrance

Pushing products on little kids is nothing new, but 2006 could see marketers lowering the bar to the under-one set. After all, as one marketing guru explains: "Consumer behaviour patterns begin officially at 16 weeks." Experts say the next trend will be scented baby products, including diapers with a vanilla fragrance, because research shows that an infant's emotions are directly tied to the sense of smell. Companies are looking to vanilla because it apparently creates an association with breastmilk. Either that, or chocolate and strawberry bombed in the focus groups.



"Mom, can I please have a small European nation?"

The direct buying power of kids aged four to 12 will hit \$52 billion in the US this year. To put that in perspective, it means American preteens spend more than the gross domestic product of Croatia.

## A GYM OF THEIR OWN

Childhood obesity is showing no sign of going away, but in 2006 look for a creative new solution to go mainstream. Last February in Halifax, entrepreneur Holly Bond opened Bulldog Interactive Fitness for eight- to 16-year-olds. The centre is equipped with arcade-style dance games and specially designed exercise bikes that link to Sony PlayStation. It was so successful that Bulldog has expanded — it was expecting to have five franchises up and, er, dancing by now in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario and BC, as well as a couple in the US. Most of the franchises also include preschooler and mom-and-tot programs.