

Above & Beyond

Ioannis Miaoulis of the Museum of Science has tips on tech toys for any age this holiday season.

IN JANUARY 2003, when I became president and director of the Museum of Science—one of the world's largest science centers and New England's highest-attendance cultural attraction—it was truly a dream come true. After all, the museum was one of the first places I had visited after moving to Boston from Greece in 1980. And my first date with my wife, Beth, was at the museum.

The museum is a wonderful place to instill a love of science in people of every age and background. Our mission is to engage children and adults in science and engineering and to advocate for the importance of technology and engineering education in schools nationwide.

As a father of two girls, I've seen firsthand that children are born engineers! Whenever a child builds a fort out of blankets and pillows or a castle out of sand, he or she is an engineer. We need to harness this natural inquisitiveness and make technology and engineering exciting in a way that is equally inspiring to boys and girls, and that can build the innovators and thinkers of tomorrow. One way we can do that is to give tech-savvy gifts from the Museum Shop.

Our museum staff has developed a terrific series of books called (1) **Engineering Is Elementary** (\$15.99 each), perfect for kids ages six to 10. The illustrated story and activity books are used nationwide to introduce children to all aspects of engineering and technology. These books are also available with lesson plans that match technology/engineering curriculum standards. In each story, a character is introduced to new skills that help him or her solve such problems as designing a water filter to provide a pollution-free habitat for a pet turtle.

Hands-on building sets like the **Young**



Architect (\$99.99) are among my favorite choices for gifts. We often host Design Challenges at the museum, and it's fantastic to observe some of the unique designs that visitors of all ages create using simple materials like cups, Popsicle sticks, and cardboard. Similarly, with the (2) **Girder and Panel Building Set** (\$49.99), kids and families can choose from a variety of building materials to design structures at home.

Board games are also excellent interactive activities. **Deflexion** (\$49.99) is a game involving both strategy and technology. Similar to chess, it includes mirrors and lights that players use to

deflect light beams, capture game pieces, and win the game.

(3) **Detachable Recreational Vehicle** (\$39.99), also known as DRV, is a remote-controlled car with a twist. This cool kit includes a motorized foam plane that recharges on top of the vehicle. With the press of a button, the plane can be launched. Another motorized vehicle that uses electronics is the (4) **Line Chaserz** (\$19.99)—optical sensors underneath the vehicle follow the twists and turns of any path you create with a special erasable marker on a two-sided erasable board.

The museum store offers a great selection of CDs and DVDs as well. Since I'm a native of Athens, one of my favorite soundtracks is from *Greece: Secrets of the Past* (\$19.99), the large-format film that we've shown in the Mugar Omni Theater. This popular CD really captures the essence of the country with traditional instruments and songs. Two of the most popular DVDs are the National Geographic film *The Incredible Human Body* (\$39.95) and Discovery Health Channel's *The Ultimate Guide: The Human Body* (\$26.99).

For people like me who rely on personal technology, the (5) **Voltaic Solar Backpack** (\$324.99) is a must. Its solar panels allow users to recharge cell phones, PDAs, iPods, and cameras. Selected by NASA, the (6) **Fisher Space Pen** (\$9.99) is a good bet too. It writes at any angle, underwater, over grease, and in extreme weather conditions. I'm also a big fan of (7) **Climb@Tron R.E.X.** (\$12.99)—a simply designed, battery-operated robot that climbs up windows and filing cabinets. Speaking of robots, the (8) **iRobot Roomba** (\$299.99) is artificial intelligence at its best. What's not to love about a robot that cleans your house while you relax? ♦