



BAD BET

THE ORANGE GAMBLER ON BUILDING ITS NCAA TOURNAMENT RESUME WHEN AGREED TO APPEAR IN THE PLAYERS ERA FESTIVAL, BUT THE BET DIDN'T PAY OFF AS SU LOST ALL THREE OF ITS GAMES. B1

HOLIDAYS

Advocacy groups put AI toys on their naughty list



These artificial intelligence-powered toys were tested by consumer advocates at The Public Interest Network. Such toys have already been shown to potentially harm children and teenagers. Rory Erlich, The Public Interest Network via AP

Experts advise parents to avoid buying cute, artificial intelligence chatbots this holiday season.

Barbara Ortutay and Matt O'Brien Associated Press

They're cute, even cuddly, and promise learning and companionship — but artificial intelligence toys are not safe for kids, according to children's and consumer advocacy groups urging parents not to buy them during the holiday season.

These toys, marketed to kids as young as 2 years old, are generally powered by AI models that have already been shown to harm children and teenagers, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, according to an advisory published this month by the children's advocacy group Fairplay and signed by more than 150 organizations and individual experts such as child psychiatrists and educators.

"The serious harms that AI chatbots have inflicted on children are well-documented, including fostering obsessive use, having explicit sexual conversations, and encouraging unsafe behaviors, violence against others, and self-harm," Fairplay said.

AI toys, made by companies including Curio Interactive and Keyi Technologies, are often marketed as educational, but Fairplay says they can displace important creative and learning activities. They promise friendship but disrupt children's relationships and resilience, the group said.

"What's different about young children

"Everything has been released with no regulation and no research, so it gives us extra pause when all of a sudden we see more and more manufacturers, including Mattel, who recently partnered with OpenAI, potentially putting out these products."

Rachel Franz, director of Fairplay's Young Children Thrive Offline Program

is that their brains are being wired for the first time and developmentally it is natural for them to be trustful, for them to seek relationships with kind and friendly characters," said Rachel Franz, director of Fairplay's Young Children Thrive Offline Program. Because of this, she added, the trust young children are placing in these toys can exacerbate the types of harms older children are already experiencing with AI chatbots.

A separate report by Common Sense Media and psychiatrists at Stanford University warn teens against using popular AI chatbots as therapists.

Fairplay, a 25-year-old organization formerly known as the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, has been warning about AI toys for years. They just weren't as advanced as they are today. A decade ago, during an emerging fad of internet-connected toys and AI speech recognition, the group helped lead a backlash against Mattel's talking Hello Barbie doll that it said was recording and analyzing children's conversations.

This time, though AI toys are mostly sold online and more popular in Asia than elsewhere, Franz said some have started to appear on store shelves in the U.S. and more could be on the way.

"Everything has been released with no regulation and no research, so it gives us extra pause when all of a sudden we see more and more manufacturers, including Mattel, who recently partnered with OpenAI, potentially putting out these products," Franz said.

It's the second big seasonal warning against AI toys since consumer advocates at U.S. PIRG last week called out the trend in its annual "Trouble in Toyland" report that typically looks at a range of product hazards, such as high-powered magnets and button-sized batteries that young children can swallow. This year, the organization tested four toys that use AI chatbots.

"We found some of these toys will talk in-depth about sexually explicit topics, will offer advice on where a child can find matches or knives, act dismayed when you say you have to leave, and have limited or no parental controls," the report said. One of the toys, a teddy bear made by Singapore-based FoloToy, was later withdrawn, its CEO told CNN this week.

SEE HOLIDAYS, A3

SYRACUSE

Rescue Mission volunteers, staff serve a record number of meals

The nonprofit delivered and served more than 4,300 Thanksgiving dinners to individuals and families.

Vince Gasparini vgasparini@syracuse.com

For the past 18 years, Matthew Withers and his wife Ginny have spent their Thanksgiving Day serving meals at the Rescue Mission alongside their two adult daughters, Emily and Caroline.

"We do it as a family," Matthew said. "We get the true meaning of Thanksgiving out of the whole deal."

For them, it's an opportunity to give back to their community and to understand that there are many people who struggle to put food on the table not just during the holidays, but every day.

"There's a whole other side of the world," he said. "And to try to help those folks is what we wanted to instill in them."

Matthew and Ginny Withers, who are both retired, said they noticed more clients coming in for food than they have ever seen in their nearly two decades of volunteering on Thanksgiving.

The nonprofit, located at 155 Gifford St., served a record 4,300 meals Thursday — 1,500 more than they served last year.

SEE RESCUE MISSION, A3



Volunteers delivered more than 4,000 meals to individuals and families around Syracuse on Thanksgiving Day. Provided

BALDWINSVILLE

Trot time

More than 1,700 people participated Thursday in the 57th annual Baldwinsville Turkey Trot sponsored by the Baldwinsville Kiwanis Club. A2

NATION

Macy's parade

Seen along this year's parade procession were Buzz Lightyear and Pac-Man balloons route along with floats featuring Labubu and Lego. A4

Man sent to prison for threatening to kill CNY man

Suspect was nabbed at Syracuse Hancock International Airport.

Greta Stuckey gstuckey@syracuse.com

A Colorado man was sentenced this week to two years in prison after boarding a plane to Central New York in April with the intent to kill someone, federal prosecutors said.

Jerry Gordon, 56, of Colorado, was sentenced for transmitting a threat in interstate commerce to injure another person, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of New York. He also was sentenced to three years of post-release supervision.

Gordon threatened to set up a sniper's nest to kill a person, prosecutors said.

His plan came to the attention of federal authorities in December, according to an affidavit from FBI agent John Hogan.

In April, Gordon admitted sending four threatening text messages to a man in the Cayuga County village of Aurora.

In the messages, he warned the victim to "get your affairs in order before April 25" because he planned to "drink your blood from the chalice that I will make out of your heart," prosecutors said.

That same month, Gordon sent a mass email to local governments and law enforcement agencies stating his intent to "start my vengeance tour and I will accomplish my mission at any cost."

He wrote that he had "very specific targets" and was "not looking to involve any innocent bystanders," and added that if people left him alone, "nothing else will happen."

Gordon also mentioned plans to take action on the Cornell University campus in Ithaca. Cell phone records showed he had sent threatening messages to a person identified as "J.W."

On April 25, Gordon boarded a United Airlines flight from Denver to Newark, New Jersey, before connecting to Syracuse.

Gordon was apprehended by FBI agents as he deplaned in Syracuse, prosecutors said.

