

Aging Gracefully

Mattel celebrates Barbie's 40th birthday

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PHOTOS BY QUAY ROGERS

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She stands tall and graceful in an elegant shimmering black and silver gown, holding a bouquet of 40 pink roses. The world is watching while Barbie turns 40 — without a wrinkle.

From her creation in 1959 by Mattel founders Eliot and Ruth Handler to becoming the most popular doll in the world with over a billion sold by 1999, Barbie has conquered the toy business.

Barbie now has two floors in the FAO Schwarz toy store in New York and was even pictured in Vogue magazine in 1997.

People young and old came to see the world-renowned doll turn 40 at the Barbie Doll Gala in El Segundo, Calif. The gala also honored women, who, Mattel said, just like Barbie, "teach little girls they can be anything."

In fact, Barbie has taken on many careers in the past. She has been a teacher, doctor, astronaut, soldier and presidential candidate. She continues to sport the latest technology, having had a computer since 1985.

Alisa Baker, a freshman biomedical science major, said Barbie has become more diverse as time goes by.

"I was really interested and amazed by all the occupations that Barbie has had throughout the years," Baker said. "I loved to change her clothes and send her on to her next job."

Tricia Draughn, graduate assistant of Student Life

Gender Issues Education Services, said Mattel has its work cut out for it to truly reflect women today.

"I think, in the past few years, Barbie has made a turn towards a broader scope of women," Draughn said. "But [Mattel] has a long way to go to really represent what women are in society."

Barbie's slender figure has also raised some concerns.

"I do not think I have been influenced by Barbie directly," Draughn said. "But my niece has Barbies, and I am concerned about her self-image."

According to the history channel web site, if Barbie was human, she would have a thirty-nine-inch chest, a twenty-one-inch waist and thirty-three-inch hips.

Josh Barnett, a sophomore computer science major, said people need to step out of the fantasy of Barbie.

"Everyone must understand that you cannot [have] that figure," Barnett said. "It's just not possible."

Others think Barbie is nothing more than a toy and the appearance of Barbie has no relevance to children.

"My sister used to play with Barbies, and I'm sure it has had some influence on her," Barnett said. "But it hasn't changed who she is."

Sabrina Tomlinson, a junior computer science major, said Barbie is nothing more than a toy.

"Most children play with dolls to be someone else," Tomlinson said. "It's just something that kids like to do."

According to the history channel web site, although 90 percent of all American girls have owned a Barbie at one time or another, there are still some who failed to jump on the bandwagon.

Kara Dotson, a freshman microbiology major, said she did not find Barbie to have a big effect on her life.

"I was never really interested in playing with Barbies," Dotson said. "So it has not had a real impact on me."

Mattel, whose personal designers bring a new look to Barbie year after year, is the fourth-largest maker of women's clothes. Mattel also makes clothes for girls and an array of other Barbie accessories.

"Even the Barbie logo sells," Tomlinson said. "As soon as the girls see it they want it. Girls are just addicted to the name."

Barbie continues to grow in popularity and sales as future generations flock to the next Barbie.

"At least she was faithful to Ken all these years," Barnett said.

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