

Up in Years



Age is but a number, but it's taking center stage

By Abby Heugel | Managing Editor



The 22-inch "50 Brilliant Stars" Bubble Balloon from Pioneer Balloon Co. brings smiles and sales.

In case you didn't get the memo, I'll let you in on a secret — it appears 50 is the hot age to celebrate right now. But while "50 is fabulous," the general trend is to incorporate any age into the celebration, most often through balloons.

"Whether we decorate for a 1-year-old's party or a 70-year-old's, we noticed the trend is to incorporate their name and/or age into the decorating," said Debbie Pizzuto of Balloon Break & Baskets Too in Lansing, Ill. "Years ago we used to spell out names and ages with aluminum tubing and 5-inch balloons, but now that we have access to Megaloons, our job is easier. It's also more cost effective for our customers, and consequently, we sell more product."



Amscan's "Another Year of Fabulous" pattern highlights the ever-popular pink and black color scheme.



At It's My Party in Dyer, Ind., Amy Veltman Cullen said customers love the Bubble Balloons, so for obvious reasons they push Qualatex Bubbles for birthdays. They've even stopped carrying some of the foils because there is a bigger profit on a Bubble.

"Plus, they just look better," Cullen said. "A typical licensed foil costs between \$1.20 and \$1.60. To be competitive with big-box stores, we sell for \$2.99. A Bubble costs about \$2.50 and we sell for \$7.99. The difference in helium is small."

Cullen said ages 30, 40 and 50 are very popular and that they'll double stuff a black "Over the Hill" balloon inside the Bubble for a really fun and unique look. Because companies have seen a rise in festive "50 and Fabulous" themed birthdays, many are now offering more milestone-related balloon designs, from fun and funky or elegant and sophisticated. Certain patterns that would fall into these two categories include animal prints, polka dots or damask print.

"A 'sweets' theme — be it cake, candy, ice cream or all of the above — is also a perennial birthday favorite, especially with women, and sweets-themed balloons can enhance this entire theme," said Lisa Bennett of Pioneer Balloon Co. "Although princess themes are often associated with younger girls, this theme can also translate to the more mature crowd, often in the form of a 'birthday diva' theme, but many of the same

elements still apply to this type of party — feather boas, bling, funky printed paperware and balloons and even tiaras."

"When it comes to adult birthdays, big colors and the age incorporated into the bouquet or décor are most popular, and elegance is always good," said Alice Kaufman of Brody's 800-4-Balloons. "We're seeing a lot of sales in Link-o-Loons and our extra large delivery bag that's large enough to hold a Link-o-Loon arch folded up."

Pizzuto said that balloon towers made out of Link-o-Loons with an oversized balloon on top are very popular at their store for all kinds of parties, but that they do around 50 percent of the towers with 3-foot Megaloon numbers on top for birthday parties.

"A big trend for our parties lately has been to incorporate the 7-inch Megaloon numbers into centerpieces," Pizzuto said. "We often spell out names in a Megaloon Arch, especially for Sweet 16 parties. Most of our customers pick their favorite color for their party scheme, but we have noticed that a lot of our women customers turning 50 tend to favor the color gold."

When it comes to younger customers, Bennett said that bright opaque colors are taking center stage. "These include Wild Berry, Orange, Robin's Egg Blue, Lime Green, as well as any shade of teal,"

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**Debbie Pizzuto
Balloon Break & Baskets Too**

Bennett said. "The current trend of sparkle and 'bling' can also translate to balloons, specifically metallic solid-colors and new Holographic Microfoils."

With young children, licensed products are always a hot commodity, but other popular themes are construction (boys), princess (girls) and farm and jungle animals.

"Every birthday is a big deal when you're a kid, and one way to make the birthday boy or girl feel special is to have a balloon that shows their age," Bennett said. "Qualatex offers several milestone-themed balloons for children, as well as Number Shapes in four colors."

Cullen said that when it comes to birthday themes for the younger crowd, "Cars," "Tangled," Angry Birds and Mario Bros. are very popular.

"Princess' or 'Diva' balloons also sell well for any age, as many people buying a balloon gift for someone else often affectionately refer to them as such," Cullen added. "Because it makes a great gift, we sell our bouquets in packages so that customers can get a balloon bag and Hi-Float included."

Patterned Profits

The key to inflating those sales is to do just that, incorporate gifts and color-coordinated party supplies in with your balloon offerings, everything from paperware to solid-color latex balloons and a variety of products with popular accents and patterns, such as zebra print, leopard print, damask, polka dots or paisley.

"Customers love balloons that coordinate with the pattern, license and general décor," said Brenda Fink of Party Magic in Godfrey, Ill. "Air-filled balloon centerpieces using 5-inch latex and a foil or 11-inch latex on top are huge hits, and they are easily coordinated to the pattern and colors."

"We have an Amscan pattern (Another Year of Fabulous) that we do coordinating balloon décor for — it is super cute and chic—and add black, white and zebra print balloons to match the pattern," Cullen added. "Zebra striped latex is hard to keep in stock, and we sell through a whole lot of birthday polka dots, too."



Centerpieces highlighting the age of the celebrant are popular at Balloon Break & Baskets Too in Lansing, Ill. Photo: Balloon Break & Baskets Too

Balloons can also be used as favors, and Kaufman said they've repackaged Balloon Wands into packages of 10, which is a better stocking level for their customers.

"They come in red, clear and blue and make 18-inch foil or 11-inch latex look like they are helium filled," Kaufman said, "which is good given the increases in helium costs."

If it is on display they will buy it, so have cash and carry items with the air filled designs out in the open and around the store. Fink creates unique balloon bouquets and adds something special like personalized foil balloons, a coordinating custom weight, etc. and said balloon columns also make a great long-lasting gift.

"We always treat latex with Hi-Float to get maximum float time out of the bouquet," she added. "Because what good is a gift if it only lasts 24 hours? Customers are looking for something different, not just balloons tied to a weight." P



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