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Teddy Bear Picnic celebrates 25th anniversary in Estes Park

ESTES PARK, CO -- There's just something about a Teddy Bear that has been a draw for Susan Swickard since her childhood days when she played with her Talking Teddy, a bear equipped with his own "tummy speaker," record player and an assortment of long-play records.

That Teddy was such a lasting memory that Swickard and her new husband opened a store that specialized in teddy bears of all shapes and sizes. That was a quarter century ago, and today the Estes Park couple's enthusiasm for their endeavor still is evident.

Come June 20, their shop, first known as The Talking Teddy, will mark the 25th anniversary of its own Teddy Bear Picnic. This free gathering for humans of all ages starts at 11 a.m. and provides an opportunity to have a picnic with the family and compete in contests and games (like the smallest bear, the largest bear, coloring contest and more). Children and their parents flock to the store for the event that also benefits "Good Bears of the World," a non-profit organization since 1969, promoting love and comfort through the teddy bear. During the June gathering, "Goody" the official mascot bear of Good Bears of the World will be attending.

"We really started the Teddy Bear Picnic as a way to have a local fund raiser for the non-profit organization," said owner Steve Swickard. Those attending the picnic can purchase a chance to get one of many bears donated for the event. From those chances, the Swickards and "Good Bears" have been able to donate teddies for use with children who have just been through a traumatic event. Since their first donation, more than 200 law enforcement and medical emergency agency vehicles have been outfitted with bears. "The officers use them in a variety of situations," said Steve. The bears also are used by paramedics as well as funeral homes, he added.

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And now, in their 25th year of operation, the Swickard's store has been named one of the top 25 retailers in the nation in a new book by George Whalin, nationally respected author and consultant, who is regularly quoted in *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *US News & World Report* and *CNN Money*. The Swickard's 5,000 square-foot store is featured in "Retail Superstars - Inside the Best Independent Stores in America" along with retail giants like Gump's department store in San Francisco , Zabar's grocery in New York and Bering's hardware store in Houston.

Over 10,000 species of stuffed animals are sold on board Estes Ark, a 100-foot long by 50-foot wide building built to resemble Noah's Ark. The Ark is located east of the core downtown area of Estes Park just off US Highway 34 at 521 Lone Pine Drive.

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