

## British TV sensation Peppa Pig World of Play opens at Great Lakes Crossing

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Christina Schafer with daughter Athena Schafer, 10 months, meet Peppa and George during the grand opening of the Peppa Pig World of Play on Tuesday at Great Lakes Crossing. (Photo: Daniel Mears, Detroit News)

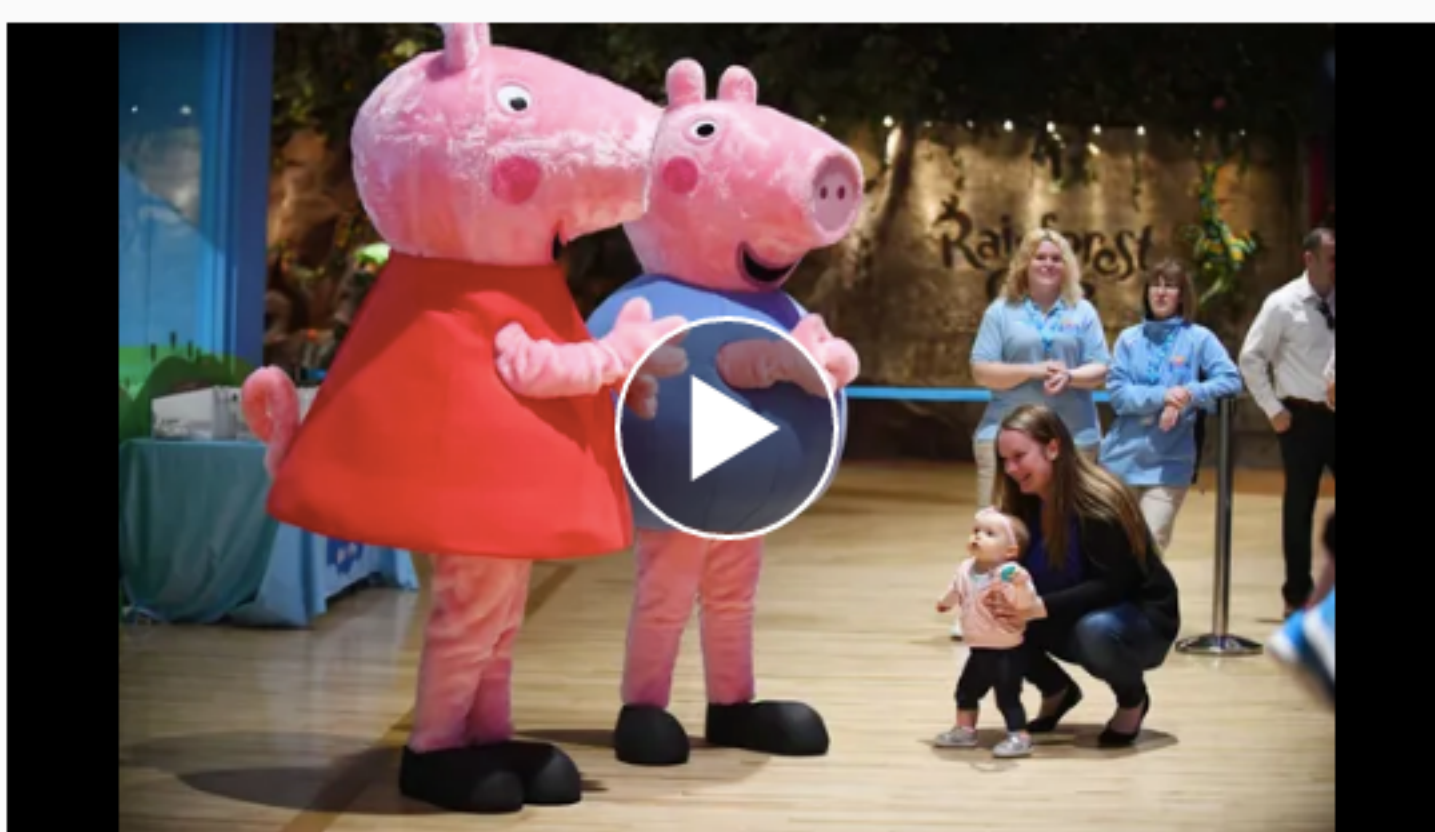
**Auburn Hills** — The toddlers waited patiently for their rock star while parents tried to maintain calm.

Finally, Peppa Pig and brother George Pig made their way through Great Lakes Crossing Outlets to the grand opening of the Peppa Pig World of Play. The adult-sized pink-costumed pigs waved to the small crowd gathered and graciously posed for photos with parents and their children.

But Chloe Crank, 2, dressed for the occasion in a long pink Princess Peppa gown, was so overcome with excitement, she burst into tears.

Her mom, Rita Crank, 30, of Macomb Township, picked her up to offer comfort.

But other children bravely approached Peppa and George, giggling and waving back to them. Peppa wore red and George wore blue and they both had on giant back shoes.



'Peppa Pig World of Play,' a play land for pre-schoolers based on the Nickelodeon/ Nick Jr. animated character Peppa Pig at Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills, Michigan. Daniel Mears, The Detroit News

Peppa Pig World of Play opened Tuesday at Great Lakes Crossing Outlets. It features 14 play areas, each inspired by instantly recognizable locations from the TV series, including Peppa's Family House, Rebecca Rabbit's Underground Adventure, George's Fort and Muddy Puddles.

"This is the third Peppa Pig World of Play we've opened, and we're very excited about it," said Jack Bennett, project operations manager for Merlin Entertainments Group, in a crisp British accent.

Never heard of Peppa Pig? She's only the biggest British sensation since the Beatles. Well, almost. She is a British pre-school animated television series directed and produced by Astley Baker Davies in association with Entertainment One.

The series, which originally aired in May 2004, is shown in 180 territories including the U.S. and UK. It airs in the U.S. on cable TV via Nickelodeon/Nick Jr. The target audience is six months to 8 years old.

Peppa and her family and friends also speak with a British accent. Bennett flew in from London about three weeks ago to help oversee the grand opening, and leaves Metro Detroit for Dallas in a couple of days.

"We have other Peppa Pig World of Play outlets in Shanghai and Dallas, so Michigan is our third."

Muddy Puddles is a big draw. When entering the play area, a section of floor is covered with Peppa's muddy footprints. She and George love to splash in the mud.

"When the kids found out they were coming here, they both insisted on wearing their Wellies (rubber boots) for the Muddy Puddles," said Mindy Neumann, 37, of Lake Orion.

There are no real mud puddles. It's all virtual. Children face a screen featuring Peppa, George, Mummy and Daddy Pig, all standing in mud puddles. Then the children jump up and down on puddles of imitation mud. And as they jump, the pigs also jump in the puddles on the screen and become covered in mud.

Jackson, 3, and Claire, 1, Neumann were jumping up and down like crazy and squealing with laughter as they caused the pigs to be covered in mud.

Asked what he liked about Peppa Pig, Jackson replied, "It's good," before racing off to the next adventure.

Jackson isn't alone, according to Bennett.

"The Peppa brand sells about \$1.26 billion globally," he said.

Judging by the Peppa toys available, it's easy to see why.



Athena Schafer, 10 months, with mother Christina Schafer, meet Peppa and George during the grand opening of the Peppa Pig World of Play on Tuesday at Great Lakes Crossing. (Photo: Daniel Mears, Detroit News)

There's everything from Peppa Pig Beanie Baby key chains for \$4.95 to a Peppa's Back to School bus for \$85, which includes a school building, classroom, students and a school bus. There's also bubble-gum scented Peppa shampoo, conditioner, body lotion and body wash. Among the best-sellers are the plush Peppa Pig and George stuffed animals in a variety of sizes.

And even the parents were getting into Peppa's World of Play.

Alex Mossine, 36, of Ferndale sat behind the wheel of Peppa's family's red car. His daughter, Frances Mossine, 2, played in the back while mom, Christine, 36, took cell phone photos.

"Yes, I'm getting into it, and I like the fact that the car is big enough for me," Alex Mossine said. "So far my daughter is interacting with everything, and it's keeping her attention."

He added, "I personally like it because it's got a cool cartoon feel to it."

Auburn Hills council members Cheryl Verbeke and Ron Moniz also appeared for the grand opening.

"I'm looking forward to bringing my granddaughter here, and look forward to creating lots of fun memories," Verbeke said.

Later in the morning, little Chloe Crank, who broke down in tears earlier, seemed to be engaged in all the play areas. She scampered from the playhouse to the fort to the family house.

She was too shy to answer questions, but her mom said, "as soon as they cut the ribbon, she ran right in and hasn't stopped since."

Peppa's World of Play is located near the AMC theater between entrances 6 and 7 at Great Lakes Crossing Outlets.



Scarlett Schwen, 2, makes her way through one of the attractions at Peppa Pig World of Play. (Photo: Daniel Mears, Detroit News)

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