

Holiday cards for all tastes and budgets

By SHEILA GARRETT
Special to the Record-Eagle

In spite of the communications revolution, e-mail, cell phones, and fax machines, most U.S. households still choose to reach out to friends and family in the traditional way, by sending greeting cards at the holidays.

This is the conclusion of "The Greeting Card and Stationery Report 2002: The Market, The Competitors, The Trends." Pam Danziger, author and president of Unity Marketing, publishers of the study, points out that old-fashioned greeting cards are often used to accompany a gift, or as a substitute for a gift. Chosen to help buyers express sentiments and emotions that may be difficult for them, cards are often saved and treasured for years.

Kristen Andersen, manager of Annie's, now at 127 Front St. in Traverse City, believes that greeting cards are still holding their own.

"Definitely," she said. "Our cards fun, and our buyers come for that adult humor. We have an adults only section that sells out each year."

They also carry more traditional cards, "from one end of the spectrum to another" said Andersen.

A traditional approach to the holidays can be found at Kim's Hallmark Korner in Traverse City.

"We appeal to a somewhat older, more conservative clientele, and we have a lot of family cards," said Sue Wise, manager.

"A little bit of you in every card" is the slogan of the new Creative Connections line at Kim's. "The card is designed so that you can add a picture, or even a bag to contain a small gift, such as a phone card or a piece of jewelry."

Wise also sees great potential in an ornament card that can be hung on a tree. "The cards have ribbon hangers. You add a photo, such as the photo of a new baby, and are meant to be kept. We have ornaments where you can insert a picture of the family," she said, "and the ornament is a frame."

These selections particularly suit a situation where a family member has died.

"We don't want to forget bereaved people at holidays," Wise explained. "We even have a Mother's Day card for the person who has just lost their mother."

Kim's also carries cards for the blended family on every occasion, with captions for stepparents, daughters and sons, Wise said.

"The theme of family and memories is strong," she said.

Cards on the Hallmark website feature captions such as "Daughter: As Unique as a Snowflake," "Grandpa, the Family's Strength" and "Grandmother: a Christmas Patchwork," reinforcing the family theme. Wise added that there are some popular card designs with quiet, peaceful outdoor scenes featuring animals.

A walk through Grand Traverse Mall card shops indicates a mild trend toward the patriotic, with one card featuring a flag, and another depicting a church, with the caption "God is With Us." Some cards seem geared to the practical bargain hunter, such as the 90-cent money holder.

Meijer in Traverse City has stationery with Santa designs for children to use in writing to the North Pole. And Maxine, Hallmark's cranky old lady, seems to be retaining her popularity in cards, party items and even in a cover that makes your vacuum cleaner look like Maxine grudgingly cleaning up.

An increase in peace card

designs depicting doves and the message "Peace on Earth" has been noticed by Sarah Eggert, manager of North Country Gardens in Northport. Another extremely popular theme among her clients, she said, is wilderness. "Animals always do well for us. So do snowy landscapes, and a Nature theme."

"We have eight brands," she said, "and we carry the handmade cards that many people like. They range from \$3 to \$6 in price."

"There is always something new," Eggert added, "and some items that are hard to get."

North Country Gardens is open seven days a week.

Jim Lutfy, manager of Lutfy's Hallmark Shop in Traverse City explained how placing card orders has changed.

"Card selections are computer generated based on the store's previous sales history. As demographics change, there is a change in what sold in years past and what sells now." His older, somewhat conservative clientele prefers traditional themes.

There is a trend, he said, toward "fresh ink" square cards with very little writing.

"They have a very concise message," he explained. "There is a very limited caption with air brush work on actual photographs. Some are in black and white, and some in a variety of colors. There is not a lot of detail, they tend to be more abstract."

There are more stepfamily captions available than in the past, he said, and cards that deal with difficult scenarios, such as illness at the holidays, with captions like "Thinking of You." Lutfy's generally carries a wide variety of peace cards, he said.

A suggestion for those who like to give a card featuring the work of a local artist is to view the Gwen Frostic line at Lutfy's. Frostic, who lived and worked in Michigan, concentrated on the



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Above, Traverse City's American Spoon Food features cards by artist Michelle Buday. Right, Lutfy's Hallmark Shop in Traverse City carries holiday cards in a wide price range.

wonders of nature, featuring delicate renderings of flowers, birds and animals. Her cards are described as "Cards with Thoughts, for the times when you just can't find the right words."

Both of American Spoon Foods locations in Acme and Traverse City carry the work of local artist Michelle Buday. Three colorful cards for Christmas include a snowflake motif in blue and purple, an outdoor scene with evergreen and birch, and a third depicting the Northern Lights.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.



Toys: What's new this season

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Keller believes another classic toy will enjoy a resurgence of popularity with kids — and parents — this year: GI Joe.

"GI Joe has an expanded section at Meijer this year, everything from jeeps to aircraft carriers," Keller said. "The news probably plays a factor in this with the pending war with Iraq."

Toy Harbor and Children's World both pride themselves on having more traditional and unique toys.

"You're not going to see the flash-in-the-pan things here," said Leslie Ansted, manager of Toy Harbor for 18 of its 19 years.

For Toy Harbor, a few of the more unique items are Groovy Girls, Spy Stuff and Magz. The last item is a magnetic building set which was named one of the Top 10 Most Popular Toys.

Groovy Girls are soft dolls that come in many different colors and have a variety of hairstyles. Accessories that can be bought separately include different outfits, sleeping bags, tents, cars, beds, chairs, sofas — even a pet dog, cat or lizard.

"These are dolls that appeal to a wide age group," Ansted said. "There are 3-year-olds who play with them, but there are 12-year-olds who play with them, too. And that's

always nice to see."

The Spy Stuff merchandise, which includes night vision goggles, door alarms, and binoculars, is targeted at boys 6 and up.

"The Spy Stuff from Wild Planet is always a good seller," said Ansted. "It seems to be a category that all boys seem to really like — things for an age group of boys that's always hard to find things for. There are a lot of different things — all really cool."

Ansted and Bobay both expect the Thomas the Train Brio set to be a big seller again this year. They have also both noticed a return in popularity of baby dolls.

"People are going back to baby dolls instead of Barbies," said Bobay, "and instead of dolls that are making noises — crying, coughing, eating."

Ansted feels the increase in Toy Harbor's baby doll sales has a lot to do with the store switching to a new doll company.

"We use a new company, Adora Dolls," she said. "They're 20-inch dolls and are just beautifully made, and the clothing is just beautiful, too."

Along with an increase in the sale of baby dolls, Bobay has also recognized a growth in hands-on items.

"I've noticed a big increase in art supply stuff this year," Bobay said.

She is selling a lot more family games, including cribbage boards, Catch Phrase, Uncle Wiggly, marbles and dominoes. One of her favorites, though, is a newer game called Gobblet.

"It's like playing checkers, but it's really beyond that," Bobay said. "It's won numerous awards this year."

Some items, however, sell well year to year.

"We always sell a lot of musical instruments," said Ansted. "We have everything from a little kazoo on up to something like Music Blocks. Kids really do love to make music."



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

Stackable dolls and tricycles are traditional items at Children's World in Traverse City.

Jill Jenkins is a local freelance writer.

Holiday Memories
"One of my favorite holiday memories is about to happen: We have a host of holiday memories from New York to Traverse City that we will no doubt savor this holiday season as Carole and I sit by the fire and contemplate the new world of the "empty nest." Not to dis watching the snow fall on West Bay, that gets old kind of quick, so rather than feel nostalgic and deserted by our children, we look forward to this season and traveling to Toronto to watch one daughter perform on stage with the National Ballet of Canada in the classic "The Nutcracker" while we await reports from the other daughter who will most likely be hiking the Machu Picchu trail in Peru. We feel truly blessed!"
Glenn Wolff, artist, illustrator & musician

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