

Consumerism does not diminish Valentine's day

By Maggie West
STAFF WRITER

Many college students find Valentine's Day to be more commercialized than any other holiday, according to a recent CNN survey. The survey, which polled 250 students at Boston University, reveals a growing contempt for both the holiday and the gift-giving associated with it.

"I really think that Valentine's Day was just created by the greeting card industry to sell more cards," said Lauren Habenicht, junior music student.

Many UNC Asheville students express negative opinions about Valentine's Day and the commercialism surrounding it.

"It seems like over the last 20 years Valentine's Day has just turned into a completely superficial tradition," said Nikki Nelson, a recent UNC Asheville graduate. "It's all about buying candy and flowers."

The average American consumer is expected to spend \$119.67 on Valentine's Day this year, up from 2006's national average of \$100.89, according to the National Retail Federation. Despite this increase, some local residents say they are abstaining from buying or receiving any gifts.

"I think the whole idea of giving gifts is kind of ridiculous," said Melissa Chapman, senior literature major.

According to Chapman, she and husband Nick think it unnecessary to exchange gifts with one another. Instead, the couple prefers to spend time together on the holiday.

While some people may abstain from gift giving, the NRF estimates that consumers will spend over \$16.9 billion on Valentine's Day this year. Of the men polled in the study, 42.9 percent said they plan on buying their significant other some kind of candy.

"It's a traditional chocolate holiday," said Asheley Holms, a manager of Oh Chocolat!.

According to the Charlotte native, who has been with the store since it opened over a year ago, the holiday is their biggest sales day of the year.

When asked about the materialistic values surrounding the holiday, Holms said the store would do well even if Valentine's Day was not such a commercial holiday.



SHANNA ARNEY - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Jen Stellar, wedding florist at Kabloom, prepares a special Valentine's day bouquet. Some arrangements can cost shoppers up to a couple hundred dollars, depending on the different types of flowers involved and number of stems used. Valentine's Day is one of Kabloom's busiest of the year.

"After all, women do love chocolate," she said.

In a related survey, the NRF found that flower sales are expected to grow this year. Over 58 percent of men questioned said that they were planning to buy flowers as gifts, up from 52.3 percent last year.

Valentine's Day is the biggest sales holiday, according to Jen Stellar, manager at Kabloom flower shop.

Many Asheville residents choose to get their significant others unique floral arrangements rather than traditional red roses, according to the florist.

"I think it's really nice when people pick out something special

"It doesn't matter if it's 1907 or 2007 - Valentine's day will always be about buying stuff."

LAUREN HABENICHT
junior music student

for their girlfriends," Stellar said. "For example, if someone picks out a bouquet of flowers in someone's favorite color."

Although several Kabloom employees acknowledge the com-

mmercialism of the holiday, they all agree the tradition of giving flowers should be upheld.

"I think that no matter how detached and commercialized Valentine's Day has become, flowers are still a natural expression of love and beauty," said Eleanor Underhill, sales associate at the shop.

While many people say the commercialism associated with the holiday is a relatively new development a quick look at its history proves otherwise.

The first mass-produced valentines were made in 1847 by Esther Howland of Worcester, Massachusetts. The daughter of a stationary store owner, Howland

made the cards out of embossed paper lace. Since 2001, the Greeting Card Association gives an annual "Esther Howland Award" in her honor.

Shortly after the invention of the valentine, chocolate became another favorite gift of the holiday. A mere seven years after Richard Cadbury invented the first heart shaped candy box in 1861, the boxes were mass produced and marketed as a Valentine's Day gifts.

The first conversational heart candies were produced in 1900, according to the New England Confectionary Company. Unlike the company's current candy, which features pastel hearts with

sayings like "Be Mine" and "Kiss Me," the original candies were cut into bigger shapes like baseballs and horseshoes. Due to their increased size, the original candies were able to hold much longer sayings such as "Please send me a lock of your hair by return mail" or "How long shall I have to wait? Pray be considerate."

Despite the changing gift giving traditions, many Asheville residents maintain that Valentine's Day was and always will be a commercial holiday.

"It doesn't matter if it's 1907 or 2007," Habenicht said. "Valentine's Day will always be about buying stuff."

Uniquely Asheville ideas for celebrating Valentine's Day

By Hannah Doyle
STAFF WRITER

Fingertips sticky from chocolates, wallets collapsed from splurging, teeth sugar-caked from chalky candies—such are the effects of Valentine's day. But for those dissatisfied with traditional Valentine's celebrations or gifts, Asheville offers an array of events this season for both couples and singles.

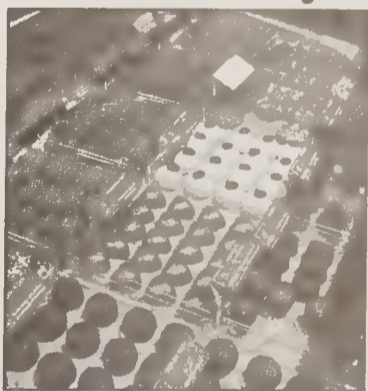
A dating game, "Singled Out," will attempt to create new matches Friday at 7 p.m. in the Highsmith Grotto. MTV's popular '90s game show "Singled Out" featured a group of 50 men and a group of 50 women competing for a date with a main contestant of the opposite sex.

Students may attend UNC Asheville's Valentine's dance Saturday from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. in the Alumni Hall. The Blue Echo will provide free food and music for attendees.

Also Saturday, the Black Mountain Center for the Arts will also host a Valentine's dance, "All You Need Is Love," from 7 to 11 p.m. Musician Jeff Stone will play such genres as Motown, Big Band and rock. The cover charge is \$15 per person and benefits the center's fundraising. A cash bar with wine, beer, soda and snacks will be available. For more information, call (828) 669-0930.

For a creative approach to the holiday, Jennifer Brook will hold a two-day workshop, *Love Letters: Re-inventing the Valentine*, on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Attendees create their own cards and love letters. The workshop costs \$135 plus a fee for materials. If interested, sign up at www.ashevillebookworks.com or call (828) 255-8444.

Chocolate Fetish allows anyone with a sweet tooth to sample its award-winning, handmade choco-



SHANNA ARNEY - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A small sampling of the smorgasbord of chocolate at Oh Chocolat!

lates. For the past eight years, voters named the chocolate the Best in Western North Carolina. Oh Chocolat! offers European chocolates and boasts an extensive collection of Belgian Neuhaus pralines and truffles.

On Valentine's day, Wild Wing Cafe will host a Speed Dating Singles Mingle.

Greenlife Grocery offers cooking classes Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Instructor Danielle Creeksong teaches participants to make such treats as miniature cream puffs and lavender truffles. The class fee is \$125 and includes lunch from the salad bar at Greenlife. Call (828) 318-2937 for more information.

On Feb. 17 Heath Miles, chef and owner of Amici Trattoria Restaurant, will offer Italian cooking and wine-pairing classes. Each session covers a different winery and region of Italy. The class fee is \$40, but the package of four classes is \$140. Call (828) 277-1010 for more information.

Visits to the Biltmore estate are \$25 per adult from now until Feb. 28 during its value season. Couples or singles can peruse the gardens, winery, farm village, shops, restaurants and 250-room house. Call (800) 624-1575 for further details.

Love finds a home on campus

By Hannah Doyle
STAFF WRITER

In the lobby of Mills Hall, Karen Moriarty, sophomore drama student, and on-duty night assistant, revealed to freshman Sheila Steelman what she planned on getting her boyfriend of three months, freshman Chip Davis, for Valentine's Day.

"There's a picture of us at a cocktail party that we both really like," Moriarty said. "He told me it was his favorite, so I figured he needed it framed. I got a simple, black, rounded frame, and I'm painting 'Can I keep you?' on the bottom."

Minutes later, Davis dropped by to visit Moriarty. Steelman told him his girlfriend's present for him was so sweet so Davis pulled Steelman aside to reveal his own plans.

"I got Karen Post-It notes that have our picture on them and say, 'Happy Valentine's Day, Karen.' They're pretty cute," Davis said. "She's in love with Post-Its, and she loves that picture of us. We were at a cocktail party, both dressed up and looking nice."

Realizing the couple bought each other scarily similar presents, Steelman burst into her dorm room and excitedly relayed the story to her suitemate, freshman Alyssa Teat.

"I thought it was adorable," Steelman said. They're so ridiculously cute together."

Davis and Moriarty could hardly contain their excitement either. Though they did not plan on exchanging gifts until Valentine's Day, the two told each other what their presents would be nearly two weeks early.

"We couldn't really wait until Valentine's Day," Davis said. "She saw my present to her on the Web site where I designed them. She was speechless. It took her a



MEGAN WILDMAN - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Chip Davis, 18 and Karen Moriarty, 20, know how to make each other happy. They are so in sync they bought nearly identical Valentine gifts.

little while to say anything, so she really liked them."

As far as celebrating the romantic holiday, the couple plans on attending UNC Asheville's Valentine's dance.

Steelman and Davis have maintained a friendship since preschool, and Steelman said she's glad that Moriarty and Davis have such a stable relationship.

"If it's not a year-round occasion then its just reduced to a Hallmark card and a box of chocolates you get at a drug store."

CHIP DAVIS
freshman student

"They never fight. All the other couples here fight because everybody sees each other all the time, but somehow they maintain a very optimistic outlook on their relationship," Steelman said. "She even helps him do his laundry."

Whether a couple actually celebrates the holiday on Valentine's Day is of no significance, as long as they do something special for each other, according to Davis.

"Valentine's Day is a very corporate holiday. I spent money on Karen's gift, but the whole idea was for us to make each other truly happy," Davis said. "When it's done in that spirit, then it's really a holiday. If it's not personal, then it's meaningless."

Davis said that some people lose sight of the true importance of Valentine's Day.

"If you think about it, you're only picking one day out of the entire year to appreciate that person. Instead, it should be a day-to-day thing," Davis said. "If it's not a year-round occasion, then it's just reduced to a Hallmark card and a box of chocolates you get at a drug store."