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Tri-City shoppers not skimping on Valentine's gifts

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The economy may have dumped us, but everything is coming up roses for Tri-Citians this Valentine's Day.

While a national study says lovers are closing their wallets, area flower and jewelry stores aren't seeing it.

"Business is picking up," Elizabeth Robles, designer at Kennewick Flower Shop, said Tuesday. "Our wholesalers say we're their busiest shop."

Not only are the arrangements flying out the door, but they're also not just inexpensive flowers. Robles said customers don't seem to mind spending extra on little luxuries for their loved one.

"We've been seeing people order more upgraded flowers like calla lilies and orchids," she said. "Hardly any carnations."

And jeweler Mark Welsh, owner of Touchstone Jewelers, is crediting love in the air and positive thinking for steady business at his store.

"You hear about all the doom and gloom, but we've been pleasantly surprised it really hasn't hit here yet," he said.

Same goes for those thinking more on the sexy side of things.

Adult games for couples and lingerie are the biggest sellers at Castle Megastore, and there are no signs of buyers skimping on those.

"We've been staying pretty strong through it all," said Sean Kofoed, assistant manager of Castle. "I was expecting a drop-off, but we seem to be doing pretty normal, if not better."

That's not necessarily the case elsewhere.

The National Retail Federation's 2009 Valentine's Day consumer survey reports on its Web site that most people in the U.S. are buying traditional flowers and jewelry -- though many are spending less.

"Valentine's Day this year will be more about small tokens of affection rather than extravagant purchases," said Phil Rist on the retail federation's Web site. He's executive vice president of Strategic Initiatives at BIGresearch, which conducted the survey.

But Tri-Citians aren't thinking small tokens.

Just Roses is offering extraordinary 5-foot-tall red roses flown in from Ecuador at its four locations. For those who want to show that size matters, they cost \$10 a stem.

If that's too lavish, Just Roses owner Connie Wormington says those on a budget can still find a deal.

"We have arrangements for everyone," she said. "We realize that some are price-conscious, so we're offering more specials this year."

Stable Valentine's Day sales are spreading the love for local businesses.

"Business has been on track, which is great," said Holly Oten, spokeswoman for Chukar Cherries in Prosser. "People are trying to help out local businesses, and we're so grateful for local support."

And with Valentine's Day not until Saturday, businesses are expecting more to come.

At Kennewick Flower Shop, where family members from California have been recruited to help, Robles said she's expecting more customers toward the end of the week.

"It's a man's type of holiday," she said, holding up her hands in exhaustion. "They always wait for the last minute, even when they know it's coming!"

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