



May 11, 2006

## Honoring Mom is big business

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Mother's Day turning into a bonanza for retailers, restaurants  
By Gayle B. Ronan

Nothing is too good for Mom. Proof of this may be found in U.S. consumers' spending plans this Mother's Day.

Expressions of filial love, estimated to reach \$13.8 billion this year, have caught up with spending on love in general—about even with Valentine's Day though ahead of Father's Day—according to the National Retail Federation's 2006 survey.

The survey found Mom's biggest fans are those with the least in their wallets—18-to-24 year olds. Though the average adult plans to shell out a record \$122.16 on gifts, cards and meals, young adults are budgeting \$142.40 for all the mothers in their lives, including stepmothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers.

"The celebration also extends to sisters, aunts, mothers of loved ones, friends and anyone who plays a mother-like role," says Rachel Bolton, a spokesperson for Kansas City-based Hallmark Cards, Inc., which has a card targeting each one.

For Hallmark, Mother's Day is the third-largest card-sending event of the year, behind the winter holidays and Valentine's Day. The company estimates about 70 percent of all households celebrate Mother's Day, giving it the highest participation rate of all holidays.

Many of those purchasing the 152 million Mother's Day cards this year will be delivering a huge emotional bang for their sealed envelope. According to Hallmark, close to two-thirds of all mothers keep their cards and many reread them whenever in need of an emotional boost.

While the National Retail Federation's survey estimates 85 percent of those celebrating Mother's Day will buy cards, it finds close to 60 percent will be treating their moms to at least one meal out.

According to the National Restaurant Association, 59 percent of those dining out with mom will be having dinner, just over half will be brunching or lunching and almost a quarter will go out for breakfast — add it up and mom should get her fill of the celebration.

At OpenTable.com, the online restaurant reservation service, "We seat four times as many diners as we would on a normal Sunday," says Ann Shepherd, senior director of consumer marketing for the San Francisco-based company. "To put it in perspective, during a normal month, we seat over a million diners. On Mother's Day alone, it is 100,000 — 10 percent of our typical month." OpenTable also sees a small surge in its party sizes — from two to three persons to at least four. Adds Shepherd: "It reflects families coming together to have a nice meal out with the children."

While restaurants expect to be jammed, AT&T expects the phones to be ringing — doing a slow build throughout the afternoon and into the evening hours. Whether they say it with flowers, eggs benedict or greeting cards, on Mother's Day people tend to say something verbally as well.

"Mother's Day ranks among the busiest days of the year for us. It can result in over 30 million additional calls on our network versus an average Sunday," says Gina Giamanco, a spokesperson for AT&T.

It is not just calls flooding the network. Mother's Day Internet traffic also spikes. More than just last minute emailing of online greeting cards or growth in voice-over-Internet calling, instant photo sharing is a major contributor as far-flung family members 'virtually' spend at least part of the day together.

"With camera phones, they can instantly communicate across distances, sharing photos, and creating shared memories," says John Kern, director of AT&T global network operations. Whether they call, share photos online, instant-message or text message on their cell phone, they are connecting with Mom, which he observes, is the whole point.

Connecting and remembering Mom was the point for Anna Jarvis, the 'mother' of Mother's Day. It was Jarvis' tireless lobbying

that led the second Sunday in May to becoming an official holiday in 1914. Soon thereafter, Jarvis became embroiled in a lifelong battle to keep merchants — florists in particular — from profiting from the day. Though, it was her introduction of carnations into the celebration that opened the door to the associated consumer spending. Once those white carnations were handed out, the florist industry never looked back.

For most people a Mother's Day without flowers is unthinkable, whether it is an arrangement, plant or flats of annuals for the garden.

"At 1-800-FLOWERS we process over 1.5 million orders during the two weeks leading up to Mother's day," says Jennifer Caccavo, communications manager for the Carle Place, N.Y. company. Mixed arrangements featuring pinks and purples and carnations are popular, as are celebrity-designer floral arrangements with upscale price tags — ranging from \$50 to \$300.

While the sums now spent in celebration of her holiday would disappoint Anna Jarvis, its emotional spirit and purpose do persist with mothers.

"It's all very nice, but I wish they wouldn't spend the money," says Beverly Troemel, of Orland Park, IL. To her the best tribute a mother could have "is that my children still like to come home. Just being together is what makes the day special for me."