

## At these rose prices, he must love you

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BY TRACY TURNER

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The cost of spoiling your sweetheart with roses on Valentine's Day might be a little higher this year. The economy has put some growers out of business, limiting supplies during a time when demand is high.

One estimate says the price for red roses has gone up 25 percent for this Valentine's Day, one of the biggest days of the year for florists.

"I've never seen the drastic price increases I've seen the last two holidays," said Jody Brown-Spivey, owner of Expressions Floral Design Studio in Gahanna. "We still try to come up with deals, but with roses, we can't lower the price too much because of the prices we pay for them."

But that didn't deter Caleb Ryan, who was very precise with his Valentine's gift order for his mom: a half-dozen roses with baby's breath and leaf trim, tied with a ribbon in a glass vase with a small balloon.

The \$34.99 red-and-white-rose combination was chosen by the 5-year-old, who was standing in for his father, who is serving with the Navy in Turkey.

"It's Valentine's Day, so I don't even think about prices," said Caleb's grandmother, Barbara Sees. "It comes around once a year, and the gifts are supposed to be from the heart."

It seems more people are feeling this way: Valentine's Day spending is expected to increase by 10 percent over last year, said Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys, a New York-based brand- and customer-loyalty consulting firm that conducted a spending survey for the holiday.

Beginning with the recession in 2008, many shoppers bypassed traditional Valentine's Day gifts such as jewelry, flowers and



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**Andrea Liberatore of Flowerama in Westerville is awash in roses as she helps the store get ready for Valentine's Day customers.**

### Roses and cocoa

About 70 percent of roses for the U.S. market are grown in Colombia, the Ivory Coast produces 40 percent of the U.S.'s cocoa beans. The other top cocoa-producing countries:



COCONUT PRODUCTION BY WORLD REGION	PERCENTAGE
AMERICAS	11%
AFRICA	70%
ASIA, OCEANIA	19%

Sources: Seedstock Magazine; World Cocoa Foundation THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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lingerie in favor of lower-priced items such as stuffed animals and CDs, Passikoff said.

Now, there's a shift back to more expensive Valentine's gifts, he said.

That includes roses, which are among the holiday's biggest sellers.

Steve Ozment, who owns the Columbus-based Flowerama chain with his wife, Andrea, can attest to that.

He's invested several thousand dollars to rent eight semi-trailer trucks to serve as extra cooling units to keep the 50,000 roses he's bought to meet customer demand for Valentine's Day.

Ozment also brought in extra staff members who will work overtime throughout the weekend and Valentine's Day to create the rose bouquets and other flower arrangements that consumers want to buy for the holiday.

The chain expects to do 1,500 deliveries on Valentine's Day, with more than 2,000 walk-in customers that day. That compares with 150 deliveries and 400 customers on an average day.

The average consumer will spend \$116.21 on traditional Valentine's Day merchandise this year, according to a survey by BIG-research. That's up 11 percent from last year.

Roses aren't the only traditional Valentine's Day gift whose price is going up. Chocolate prices are also rising. However, most of the Valentine's chocolates already on shelves had prices set earlier.

It's possible high-quality Valentine's products could cost a little more, but by Easter, prices likely will rise, possibly by as much as 5 percent, said Marcia Mogelonsky, U.S.-based global food analyst for Mintel.

There are a few reasons behind the increase, including political turbulence in Ivory Coast, the world's largest producer of cocoa beans. That conflict led to a one-month ban on exports that was announced in late January.

But at Anthony Thomas Candy Co., the prices on most Valentine's Day candies are holding steady.

In fact, the best-selling holiday-theme candy at the Columbus-based company is the 12-ounce box of chocolate-covered strawberries, which will cost \$16.95, the same price as in 2009, said Candi Trifelos, whose family owns Anthony Thomas.

"We've held these prices for some time because we think that most people are still wanting a good value for their money," she said. The company has held the line on prices by becoming more efficient.

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