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NEWS Monday, Feb 23, 2009

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Businesses sweeten the deal as Valentine's Day spending falls

BY JOHN AUSTIN
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Love hurts. So does the prospect of spending a fortune on Valentine's Day.

At least that's what consumers are telling the National Retail Federation. Based on a recent study of adults over 18, the federation projects a drop in Valentine's Day spending from \$122.98 per adult over age 18 in 2008 to \$102.50 each this year.

"A bad economy won't stop Cupid this Valentine's Day, but it might slow him down," federation President Tracy Mullin said in a statement. "This year more than ever, consumers will look for creative and inexpensive ways to show those they love how much they mean to them."

That's why businesses of all kinds are hustling extra hard to get some love this year.

Boston's Restaurant & Sports Bar is trying to get a bite of the business with heart-shaped pizzas. To sweeten the deal, the company is donating \$1 from each sale to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International. Some Waffle Houses are promoting a \$19.99 steak dinner-for-two special on Valentine's.

Of course, some guys want a bigger bite. Benny Black, owner and general manager of Platinum Motorcars, rents Ferraris, Lamborghinis and other high-end sports and luxury cars. For the first time, the Highland Park entrepreneur is packaging luxury car rentals with high-end Valentine's Day hotel stays, spa treatments and fancy restaurants.

He's sold four \$1,000 Love Jones and six \$2,500 Glamorous Life packages to customers, who tend to be executives wanting minimum fuss and maximum returns.

His \$5,000 Pretty Woman package, which includes being whisked away to a night on the town in a black Rolls Royce Phantom, reservations at a Hotel ZaZa suite, a shopping excursion in a Porsche or Mercedes and spa treatment, hadn't sold by midday Friday.


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