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Part of the problem, said Julie Chouinard, manager of Valley River Center's The Card Cage, is that Valentine's comes at the very end of a long holiday season.

"We're a little burnt-out from Christmas," Chouinard said. "If there's anything to that, it's the burn-out from Christmas."

Just think of it. For most retailers, the Christmas season starts in November. Four months of unabashed capitalism is probably enough to wear anybody down.

And this year isn't even a particularly busy Valentine's Day, Chouinard claimed.

"Business started off real good at the beginning of February, then leveled off considerably. We're doing a little less than last year. Maybe it's the weather," Chouinard said.

Chouinard didn't have an exact customer count of the business her store has done these last few weeks, but Steven Brence of Mark's Hallmark in Valley River Center said that store is averaging 650 to 800 customers a day.

Handling that volume of people wears Brence down. How does he feel at the end of the day?

"Tired. Reclusive. I feel very claustrophobic in there — narrow aisles. I don't feel like being around people for a while. I feel anti-social, violent," Brence said, and laughed. "I start to understand hate crimes."

If the 650 to 800 people that greeting card salespeople like Brence handled in a Valentine's Day rush were the well-behaved sort, those salespeople might be happier. But as Chouinard said, "There are always the type that want to cause trouble."

Who are these people? "The gangs of adolescent boys who are loud, obnoxious and generally rude," King said.

"The guy that brings up the

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Love: a grave mental disease.

— Plato

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