Study shows Internet won't kill greeting cards

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only 25 per cent.

San Francisco resident Frans Werner Erhard mailed 62,824 Christmas cards in 1975, not because he had that many friends, which would have made for a great Christmas story, but simply so he could beat the Guinness record.

For the rest of us, the tradition of mailing Christmas cards to people we know is still very much alive, even with the arrival of the Internet.

"The novelty of e-cards, sending greetings by e-mail, has worn out and the e-card industry is declining," said Deidre Parks of Hallmark Cards. "People have returned to the traditional paper card."

In fact, a survey conducted in York Region helped prove the Internet will not be the death knell of the paper Christmas card.

In a two-year study in a Newmarket subdivision that became a computer community in the mid to late 1990s, University of Toronto professor Barry Wellman discovered wired residents were more active in the community, had more neighbourhood social ties and communicated with those ties more frequently than non-wired citizens.

"Computers were getting people back into the habit of correspondence by writing; e-mail and electronic greetings are complementing paper greeting cards, not replacing them," Mr. Wellman wrote.

Still, America Online Inc. says it has 2,000 e-cards in 140 categories for the 50 per cent of its subscribers who will send electronic cards this Christmas.

"Members who prefer paper cards will be able to personalize and print their own greetings through a create and print program," said Molly McMachon of AOL.

Deborah Thompson, manager of marketing and communications at Carlton Cards Canada, said there will always be snail-mail Christmas cards.

"We haven't noticed a drop at all," she said.

"People either do both; send electronic messages and traditional cards or just stick to cards.

"Anyone can press a couple of buttons and that's not really what the tradition is all about."

Ms Thompson said 81 per cent of Canadian households mail Christmas cards each year and 93 per cent of all cards are bought by women.

"Across Canada, we'll send more than 100 million cards this season, with each household sending and receiving an average of 18 cards."

A random sampling of people selecting cards at the Carlton and Hallmark card locations at Markham's Markville Mall last week restored our faith in the tradition of giving at Christmas.

Of more than 20 people asked "Why do you send Christmas cards?", 75 per cent said it was because they felt so good when they received cards themselves.

Said Nancy Kwan, her arms stuffed with boxes of cards: "When you get a card from someone you haven't heard from in a long time, it's a wonderful feeling."

MARKHAM ACTIVIST REMEMBERED

STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

The Human Services Planning Coalition presented Jean Bowman of Markham a framed edition of its report, in memory of her late husband Sam, who was a social activist in Markham and the region. The coalition held a press conference at the regional building to announce the release of this report.

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