

# Dorm decor drives sales

Students spend plenty making college room feel like home

By Tyeesha Dixon

Sun reporter

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"The least-expensive stuff is just as good as the expensive stuff," said Kirkland, who expects to spend \$100 this season on furnishings. She spent \$250 her freshman year.

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Krugman said parents are willing to help pay for their children's dorm shopping sprees to help ease the transition between high school and college. The difference between now and a decade ago is that students need more to make that transition smooth, Krugman said.

Elizabeth Symonds, 53, of Olney, said that although dorm shopping is much more expensive than when she went to college in the 1970s, she still helps her two college-age children with most of the costs to furnish their rooms. She acknowledged that advertising pressure has prompted children to ask for more.

"It's very clear the stores are doing very heavy marketing in those areas, and that did not exist in the '70s," Symonds said.

Higher tuition costs are stretching many family budgets and Symonds said that has pushed her and her children to shop around for dorm furnishings. Symonds said there's little parents can do about higher education costs, so savings must be found elsewhere.

"We can choose to buy the necessities, or parents and students can choose if they want to spend that money to be extravagant," said Symonds, who expects to spend about \$200 on dorm supplies this year. "I think college students and parents have control over what that budget is."

Technology a factor

She added that technology is also a big factor driving this generation's spending.

"There weren't microwaves when I went to college," she said.

Experts say popular home improvement television shows like Extreme Home Makeover and Trading Spaces have also affected students' spending decisions. Krugman said those shows often give students decorating ideas that help them maximize their living spaces with fashionable room decor.

"It's all about home makeovers - more importantly, home makeovers on a budget," Krugman said.

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Jeff Gawronski, a college dorm expert for Dormbuys.com, said that in recent years the company has seen its biggest increase in space savers and bedding. He said one item that gained popularity quickly is the Mini Mantle, a plastic shelf that holds to the frame of a bunked or lofted bed without damaging the post.

"That's the most challenging thing - condensing stuff," Gawronski said. "Students are always looking for stuff that will fit in their room but looks good, too."

That's the case with Geisel, the [Towson University](#) sophomore, who is looking online and in catalogs to spot the latest trend. "It's colorful, but at the same time it's very modern and edgy," she said.

Besides designer linens - particularly Ralph Lauren and Nautica - popular trends this year include curtains with temporary rods, bright colors and lots of pillows, said Glenda LeGendre, vice president of marketing and public relations for [Villa Julie College](#).

Beth Rosko, associate dean and director of residence life at Villa Julie, said the school added on-campus housing two years ago to what traditionally had been a commuter school. Building on the recent trend of fancier dorms, some students enjoy single rooms, gypsum wallboard rather than cinder block walls and plusher carpeting.

Those kinds of changes at universities and colleges across the country also have helped to push the dorm decor market. Lavish apartment and suite-style residence halls provide students more room to work with when choosing furnishings.

'A positive thing'

"It's a positive thing," said Jomita Smith, a residence hall coordinator at [Towson University](#). "I think it's showing us how creative they can be. It never ceases to amaze me, what they come up with."

Geisel said the investment, while sometimes expensive, is worthwhile. Students seek comfort and a way to let their personalities show through the way they decorate, she said.

"It may seem like a lot now, but if you buy things that will last, you're going to be here for four years, and it will be worthwhile."

[tyeesha.dixon@baltsun.com](mailto:tyeesha.dixon@baltsun.com)

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