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## **Making romance: Keeping the flame alive takes effort**

By Susan Broili, The Herald-Sun  
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DURHAM -- Want to make that relationship last? Then, don't just talk about love, show it. While Monday's the big day to do just that, being romantic should be something people do all year long, according to a local marriage counselor and other folks who spoke from their own experiences.

Betty Gardner knows a thing or two about the importance of romance. The Durham resident smiled and her eyes misted a little as she remembered some of the romantic things her late husband did during their 34 years of marriage. He died seven years ago.

"He'd make phone calls just for no other reason than to say 'Hi.' He would go to watch chick flicks when it's not his thing to do, surprise me with flowers on days other than anniversaries and Valentine's," Gardner said.

She remembers once, when she had gone to stay with her sick mother, she had opened her suitcase and found a stuffed animal her husband had tucked inside so she would have something to snuggle with.

And Gardner reciprocated.

When she packed his lunch, she would sometimes leave notes that said "Hope you're having a great day. Love you."

"I'd watch football with him and I don't like football," Gardner said. "They're simple things that say 'I appreciate you and you're special.'"

On Valentine's Day, they would go out to eat and exchange cards, she added.

But the expectations Valentine's Day creates can also lead to trouble.

"It's a loaded day," said marriage counselor Judith Barnett. "The number of people who come into my office because things did not go well on Valentine's Day is noteworthy."

It's a good idea for people in a relationship to take the day seriously, Barnett said.

"Be really thoughtful and think very intentionally about what to do on Valentine's and make a big deal of it because it's a day that's set aside for love," Barnett said. "And, if there's nothing done -- you can read into that that the other person is not thinking much of you."

### **Turn things around**

This day also presents an opportunity to do something to start to turn a relationship that's in trouble around. But it's important to keep being romantic after Valentine's, Barnett said.

Barnett, a psychologist who has counseled couples and individuals for 20 years, has seen many a person in need of romantic advice walk through the doors of her Chapel Hill office.

"All romance is is positive attention paid to the other person and without that the relationship crumbles," Barnett said.

"It means different things to different people and different things to men and to women," Barnett said of what people consider romantic.

"For women, romantic means attentiveness and thoughtfulness that convey understanding and respect," Barnett said.

Women tend to fall into two camps as to what types of romantic things they like, although these aren't mutually exclusive.

Some women like help in doing things such as warming up the car, folding laundry, taking out the trash. Other women prefer flowers, candy and cards. But women trying to watch their weight may not appreciate candy. As a general rule, "One piece of candy is better than 10 pieces," Barnett said.

"For men, it's words or deeds or physical affection that shows she really appreciates what he brings to the relationship," Barnett said. "Admiration is a real turn-on. Physical ways of expressing love mean a lot to men."

And physical does not just mean sex. A hug, a pat on the shoulder will also show him you care, she added.

"The idea is to find out exactly what your partner likes," Barnett said.

She advises people to go back in time and remember what their spouse had liked at the beginning of the relationship. But it's also important to keep paying attention because people change.

### **Buy for them**

With couples, it's particularly importance to resist the tendency that all people have to give something they'd like to get themselves, because your other half is likely to be different, Barnett added.

"People often marry opposites. That old saying: 'Opposites attract' is true. It's an effort to make a whole," Barnett said.

"When things are going well, romance comes intuitively," Barnett said. "It's because in those romantic days, people are really tuned into each other. People are looking, watching, noticing what their partner likes, what makes them smile."

But as time goes by, couples become burdened down by children, unexpressed conflict and become more distant, she added.

"Sometimes, romance needs to be jump-started," Barnett said.

Often men think they can't be romantic because it would take too much time, she said.

"They don't understand how easy it is. It can be something that takes 30 seconds," Barnett said.

She gives men romantic assignments such as giving cards and doing other things.

But sometimes the response to sudden romantic behavior can be suspicion about a possible affair, Barnett warned. She said it's a good idea to prepare your partner by telling them you know you haven't been very attentive lately and that's about to change.

Since there are irreconcilable differences in every relationship, romance serves another function, Barnett said.

"It really nurtures the positive energy in the relationship so you don't notice the differences. What romance does, it smoothes and facilitates dealing with the rough spots," Barnett said.

### **Show you still care**

Steve Buback took a break from doing his laundry at Field's Laundromat on Ninth Street to talk about romance.

"It lets you know your relationship is strong. I think it's what keeps it viable," said Buback, a Duke University graduate student in environmental studies. "I guess it's a good way of showing the person you still care and that you're interested in the person."

He mentioned some of the romantic things he and his girlfriend do.

"We cook together a lot, go on hikes, go out and watch the stars," he said.

He likes surprises because it shows the other person put some thought into it. "They're heart-felt," Buback said.

He especially likes it when his girlfriend gives him "back rubs and little kisses when I'm not expecting them," he added.

"I think it's important," Ryan Stahle said of being romantic. She and her husband, Paul, have been married for four years. Earlier this week, she and their 20-month-old son, Jasper, were enjoying a sunny day feeding ducks by the pond at Duke Gardens.

"The more years you're in a relationship, the more mundane it can be," Stahle said. "Romance is part of a relationship that keeps you excited about the other person."

Her husband is in graduate school at Duke University, where he's studying public policy.

"The other day, I came home expecting to take him to school and he had decided to take the day off and take me out to lunch. We also went to a park. It was a surprise," Stahle said. "It doesn't have to be anything big even."

Her husband likes soft drinks so sometimes she will take him a soda when he's not expecting it.

"It's just so important to feel like your significant other thinks about you," Stahle said.

For Valentine's, she plans to make him a CD of songs he likes and the two may go out to eat while her in-laws baby-sit.

"It's important to do something on Valentine's 'cause that's the day everyone knows you're suppose to be thought of," she said.

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