

Eleven little girls sit quietly around a long table. Little coats hanging off the backs of their chairs, they whisper to one another in anticipation of what is to come.

“It’s quiet right now,” one mother said in passing, “but just wait until it gets started.”

Sitting in front of each girl is a glue stick, a child-safe pair of scissors and a package of pink, white and red papers, some solid in color and others printed with festive designs of glittery hearts, dots and stripes. The girls gleefully look at the packages, but don’t yet touch them.

These girls are at the Scrapbook Superstore on Odana Road, and today, they will make Valentine’s Day cards by hand.

“There’s something maybe Victorian, old-fashioned, cute about a handmade valentine that’s very old-time,” said Kamila Younkman, who brought her two daughters to the class. “It’s got a romantic vibe about it.”

According to Diane Luebke, a sales associate and class instructor at the Scrapbook Superstore, Valentine’s Day is the second busiest time of year for the store, the first being Christmas — and they plan ahead accordingly.

When visitors walk in the door, they are greeted by a display of dozens of Valentine’s Day cards made by the staff to serve as inspiration. Some sparkle with glitter adornments, others pop with the help of die cuts and several come alive with the careful coloring of copic markers, which allow the artist to delicately blend colors like watercolor paints.

Valentine-themed supplies have been pulled from the shelves and coordinated to create an aisle of materials. Heart-shaped rubber stamps are first and range in tone from

cartoon-like to elegant hearts inspired by filigree, some allowing for space in which to write a sweet message. They are accompanied by an assortment of inks in signature Valentine colors: red, purple and pink. There are dozens of selections for pattern paper: red background with pink, sparkling hearts; crimson stripes; bubble-gum pink dots against a white background or an off-white with a burgundy-colored velvet damask print that's smooth to the touch.

While Valentine's Day brings in business, Scrapbook Superstore employees noticed it brings a special clientele. While some were adults looking to make cards for family and friends, many were families looking for supplies for their children's Valentine's Day celebrations. This sparked the idea for a Valentine's Day card-making class exclusively for children, which has been held for four years now.

Back in the classroom, instructor and sales associate Kate Katzban-Beren leads her pupils through the instructions for their first set of valentines. She shows them the final outcome: a small envelope glued onto construction paper, which is then glued to cardstock and adorned with a bow. Inside each small envelope is an even smaller card with a sticker that reads a phrase like "Sweet" or "XOXO."

Each girl is the picture of concentration, and each works by her own code of conduct. Some pile all of the materials into a mountain of Valentine hues, digging the required items from the mess as needed. Others delicately organize their paper and cardstock into tidy stacks, methodically creating an assembly line of Valentine's Day cards.

Watching each child carefully assemble each card gives meaning to the phrase "labor of love." Some of the cards won't fit in the envelopes, or the bows refuse to adhere

to the cardstock, but each problem is confronted and conquered with the help of Katzban-Beren. While making the cards can be meticulous, many have memories their own Valentine's Day card-giving.

“It was a big day for girls, watching the reaction from the boys you'd give the cards to, or attaching candy to some of them,” Luebke said. “I remember some of my kids' stories when they'd come home, being excited that they got a bigger valentine than so-and-so from this boy.”

While Luebke admitted that the children's card-making classes were more popular with girls, she did say it was a trend some boys grew into. Her own son, now 21, quickly learned the benefits of a handmade card.

“He knows he doesn't even need to buy a present, if he makes a card for his girlfriend, he gets a lot more points than he would if he bought something,” she said with a laugh.

Looking over the shoulders of some of the students is Mary Tejada, who is here with her four granddaughters. Mostly observing, she steps in to assist her grandchildren when needed and watch with a smile when she isn't.

“When I was a little girl, you didn't have to give everyone a valentine,” she says to her grandchildren. Tejada attended grade school in the 1950s, when the rules of Valentine's Day were different, a notion that piqued her granddaughters' interest. “You didn't have to, but you could.”

“Really?” one says, kneeling in the seat of her chair to listen closely.

“Did you ever get none?” another asks. She laughs.

“Oh, I always got some. But I didn’t want anyone else to have sad feelings, so I always made one for everyone.”

The girls then resume their card making, resolved to give one to everyone they knew.

The class moves on to the second and third set of cards: the second with stickers and holes through which to poke a piece of candy, and the third set featuring animal stickers and puns to accompany each one — “A little bird told me you’re tweet,” or “Be my valentine, we’ll have a whale of a time.”

Both Scrapbook Superstore employees and patrons said Valentine’s Day cards don’t have to be too involved, but one piece of advice remained consistent:

“It’s got to be from the heart,” Younkman said.

As soon as it all started, the class is over. The girls are given a bag of candy to take home — causing some wide eyes in result around the table — and excitedly collect their stacks of assembled cards. As they talk with their friends and show their parents the cards they made, it’s clear why Valentine’s Day is such a popular holiday.

“I think anything you make, you put love into it,” Tejeda said. “And what more important thing could we have to put love into than a Valentine’s Day card?”