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Patriotic spirit begins at homes By: Amy Doolittle. Washington Times, The (DC), 07/03/2004; (AN 4KB20040704203004)

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Regional Business News

Patriotic spirit begins at homes**Real estate agent plants 11,000 flags for holiday**

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Almost 70 percent of Americans own an American flag. Eric Stewart is doing his part to help the other 30 percent fly the nation's colors on July Fourth.

Mr. Stewart is a flag planter. The real estate agent with Lewelyn Realtors in Rockville is placing 11,000 flags next to mailboxes in several Montgomery County communities.

"I so appreciate the freedom that we enjoy in America," Mr. Stewart said. "I thought it would be a nice way to build community."

Although he has been planting flags since 1996, this year is his biggest distribution. He and a team of 50 paid helpers, two of his sons and his real estate co-workers have placed flags in neighborhoods throughout Rockville, Potomac, North Potomac, Kensington, Chevy Chase, Olney and Gaithersburg, where he lives.

Lewelyn Realtors spent \$8,000 this year buying the flags and the labor to distribute them. Although Mr. Stewart does not advertise with the flags, he sends out a newsletter in June to tell people they are coming.

Displaying American flags has become more common since the September 11 terrorist attacks. The number of people owning flags has climbed to 68 percent from 63 percent last year, according to a survey from the National Retail Federation, a trade organization for the retail industry.

"There seems to be more and more interest in showing patriotism," said Tracy Mullin, president and chief executive of the retailer trade group.

Stores are meeting shoppers' patriotic fervor. Target, one of the nation's largest discount retailers, sells a variety of items with an American theme.

"There is party and picnic ware as well as Independence Day-inspired home-decor products," Target spokeswoman Lena Michaud said. "What we really see is the patriotic merchandise has expanded."

Target sells myriad patriotic items, from patio lights to place mats.

The stores also sell a rustic flag-swinging pendulum clock and a crystal flag pin.

The freedom to display patriotism is what matters most to some shoppers.

"I think most of us are very proud and very fortunate to be able to live in a country where we can purchase patriotic things," said Nancy Trampler, a visitor from Ohio who teaches fifth-grade math.

Others buy patriotic products because it makes them proud of their country.

"It just makes you feel good - gives a strong feeling for the country," said Joe Pennington, who was visiting the District with his wife and two children. All were wearing red, white and blue.

American Spirit, a patriotic retail store in Union Station, sells items from flag T-shirts to campaign buttons

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and mugs displaying the faces of presidents past and present.

"People are very patriotic recently," said Linda Williams, manager of American Spirit.

American Spirit's business skyrocketed when patriotic fervor took hold after September 11. Mrs. Williams still sees many shoppers interested in owning red, white and blue.

"I don't know if it's because of the war or just in support for their country," Mrs. Williams said. "I think they believe in the American spirit."

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