



Chip Scheuer

Women's Health Care Center volunteer Jennifer Mayfield models

special earrings beside tree decorated with unusual ornaments.

A gift for the person who doesn't want everything

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

The Santa Cruz Women's Health Center is offering practical Christmas gifts for the man or woman who has everything, or more aptly, for people who don't have everything and don't want to catch it either: condoms.

Condom jewelry and condom variety packs — a "festively wrapped baker's dozen assortment of condoms with instructions of how to use," as the health center put it — may be just the thing to ease those what-can-I-get-him/her shopping blues. At \$5 a shot for the variety packs, \$4 for earrings and \$2 for a

pin, the condom gifts are economical too.

"Make great tree ornaments and stocking sufferers!!!" proclaims a press release from the health center.

It's the third year the health center has sold the condoms as holiday gifts, said Ciel Benedetto, director of the center, located at 250 Locust St. in Santa Cruz. The idea was conceived by Sheri Sobin, who Benedetto described as a feminist practical nurse working at the center.

Benedetto readily acknowledged that the condom gifts are the type of thing apt to

provoke snickers. Wearing the earrings on the street invariably draws chuckles, she said, mainly from men familiar with the "Gold Circle Coin" condoms used to fashion the jewelry.

"When you wear it (the jewelry)," she said, "people laugh a lot."

But then, the main idea of the gifts is not so much to sell a usable item as to make a statement, Benedetto said.

"It's using humor to educate people and to remind them that condoms are important," she said.

Nothing has increased that

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importance so much as the AIDS epidemic, she said. The condom holiday gifts help promote the prevention of AIDS and other diseases like herpes and venereal disease.

AIDS is also forcing many Americans to overcome their "puritanical" attitudes and prompting some straight talk about sex, condoms and birth control, Benedetto said.

"More mothers are willing to talk about birth control because of the threat of disease," she said.

Benedetto said the gift condoms are hot sellers and the center has a hard time keeping them in stock.

"A lot of mothers and grandmothers buy them for their kids and grandkids in order to make a point," she said.

The condom jewelry makes great Hanukkah gifts as well as Christmas presents, Benedetto said. In their gold foil wrapping, the condoms resemble the chocolate-covered gold coins traditionally showered on Jewish children.

Of course, the condoms can also fulfill their practical function, she said, as long as they haven't spent too much time dangling from ears and pinned to shirts and sweaters. The condom companies estimate their shelf life at three years, but health center employees like to use a more modest estimate of one year, provided they're kept in a cool, dark place, that is.

"Wearing them on your ear or wearing them in the sun for a whole year, I would say no," Benedetto said.

She also warned against using only the Gold Circle Coin condoms, one of the few non-lubricated condoms on the market, as a pregnancy preventative.

A spermicide must be used in conjunction with the condom, she said, adding that use of a spermicide is also recommended with lubricated condoms; the spermicide on lubricated condoms is sufficient to protect the user from diseases and viruses, but not from pregnancy.

Conversely, the birth-control pill may be sufficient to protect against pregnancy, but not against disease, she said. The gift condoms are just another way to get that message across to sexually active men and women of all ages and sexual preferences.

"And the humor angle is, I think, a really big part of it," she said.