

FINAL EDITION

The Atlanta Journal- Constitution

SUNDAY

Retailers break mold, target more campaigns toward single people

BALTIMORE SUN

If a hardware store could speak, it would speak of home. It would speak of Dad buying tools, paint, a garden hose, grass seed and sundry other accessories of American domestic family life.

It would not necessarily speak to the single person, at least not until recently. Hardware store marketers have lately begun to notice that unmarried folks also need paint, extension cords and Spackle. The retail chain Ace Hardware, for example, has been changing its tone, tinkering with the store signs and colors in hopes of seeming more friendly to women and others no one calls "Dad."

So it goes elsewhere in retail. Travel agents, bulk-goods stores and food purveyors are shifting their marketing and advertising — even the look of products — to reflect the growth in the numbers of Americans who live alone or with unmarried partners.

"Companies are starting to recognize singles because the census figures show the numbers are there," said Thomas F. Coleman, executive director of the American Association for Single People, a group based in Southern California that claims 1,200 members and calls itself a "human rights" advocate for the unmarried.

The proportion of one-person homes has increased from 17 percent in 1970 to 26 percent today, accounting for 26.7 million households. The number of same-sex households also rose sharply.

Helen Dennis, a University of Southern California lecturer specializing in retirement, says the real change — affecting the millions of senior singles living at home — will come over the next few decades, as baby boomers retire.