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San Francisco Chronicle

MATERNITY AWARD 'Push prize' says it all

Heather Maddan, Chronicle Staff Writer

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It used to be that a new mom leaving the hospital might bring home a bouquet or two of flowers with her new bundle of joy. Some of today's postpartum mommies, however, depart from the maternity ward with another kind of tiny treasure -- new diamond pave rings, amethyst bangles, ruby necklaces and other pricey baubles to commemorate the occasion.



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Dubbed "push presents" or "push prizes," the term refers to a glitzy present given by a husband seeking to offer something more lavish than flowers, cards or chocolates to convey his appreciation for his partner's labors. Often, they include the child's birthstone, or a combination of stones that includes the parents' or siblings' birthstones. "It's hard to get men to buy jewelry, so it's a good excuse to get some," said Amy Madrigal, who lives in Lafayette. Her husband bought her a \$1,600 diamond and sapphire ring with their son, Jacob's, name and birth date inscribed in the band. "Every time I look at that ring I think of Jacob," said Madrigal, adding that she plans to pass it on to her son for his wife or daughter when the time arrives.

Though no one has done extensive research into this gift-giving pattern, anecdotal evidence from mommy groups, jewelers, dads and observations by delivery-room nurses suggests it is on the rise.

"Coming up with such gifts is itself a creative form of adapting to new conditions confronting people having children," said Steven Sherwood, a lecturer in UCLA's sociology department whose research focuses on contemporary American culture. Though such gift giving may be popular in certain circles, he said he doubts it will become a tradition.

"While we often characterize American society as materialistic,"

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Sherwood said, "we are also a deeply idealistic society, and the idea of giving 'gifts' to acknowledge a natural human act (childbirth) tends to run against the grain of the Puritan work ethic that we, as a culture, still embrace."

Greg Allen, a New Yorker who started Daddytypes.com after the birth of his daughter two years ago, said he's similarly skeptical and considers "push presents" to be in the same vein as wedding registries -- something men are being told to do.

"You wonder if the baby industry is pushing this. or the jewelry industry," he said before adding, with a laugh, "not that I don't want to celebrate mothers, because I do every day of the year."

Nevertheless, daddies-to-be browsing his blog will find "push present" posts listing "his" and "her" gift suggestions, such as a pair of \$60 baby cuff links from the Seattle-based store Fancy to the \$1,000-\$8,000 Aaron Basha enamel and gemstone baby shoes, which are must-haves for Manhattan mommies.

Colin Alley, a 37-year-old San Francisco architect, had never heard of "push presents" before meeting a jeweler at an engagement party who specialized in such things. He decided to surprise his wife, Erin, with a \$3,000 trilogy ring to celebrate the birth of their son, Cayden. Alley chose a 14-karat white gold and diamond ring made of three interconnected bands to represent his family's lineage.

The ring was made by Marc Stiglitz, designer and owner of Hand in Hand Custom Jewelry Design in San Francisco, who does 30 to 40 percent of his business in "push presents" ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 and beyond.

"There is a sense of pride that goes into it," Stiglitz said.

There's also the celebrity factor.

This month's InStyle magazine showed the \$6,000 gold charm bracelet Sarah Jessica Parker received from Matthew Broderick for the birth of their son, James Wilke, in 2002.

Sales of rings made by Babybands in Scottsdale, Ariz., skyrocketed after being spotted on Cheryl Hines of HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm" after the birth of her daughter.

The "mother's rings," priced at \$495 to \$5,575, are designed by Jodi Jaffe using white gold, yellow gold or platinum set with pink and blue diamonds or sapphires.

SoulMate diamonds, worn by celebrity A-listers like Madonna and Reese Witherspoon, also launched a line of diamond pendants priced from \$299-\$499 to celebrate a little one's arrival.

"Every child is different and unique. Why not commemorate their birth with a special piece of jewelry and celebrate that wonderful child all the time by wearing it in honor of them?" said celebrity and expectant mom Jennie Garth, whose husband, actor Peter Facinelli, gave her charms when she had their daughters.

And it doesn't just stop with jewelry -- some Bay Area moms have reported receiving new cars (safer, better for transporting the cargo) and even tropical vacations.

Karin Appelbaum suspects that it is mothers, sisters and wives that are behind the push for presents. The Pleasant Hill stay-at-home mom received a silver engraved Tiffany heart tag bracelet when her son was born. It doubles as his favorite toy, she said.

Appelbaum said she hopes the concept does not become overly marketed or commercialized by companies, and that as long as a gift is thoughtful -- whether it is a handwritten poem or an all-expenses-paid trip to Paris -- it will have enormous value to the new mom.

Barbara Savitz, a labor and delivery nurse at California Pacific Medical Center since 1980, agreed that there is still a lot to be said for the things that are priceless.

"I have seen jewelry -- pendants, bracelets and a diamond ring that impressed me," she said. "But it's the caring that the couples do -- the looks that they give each other -- that is the present. Husbands say, 'Thank you for having my baby' or 'I love you more than I could imagine' and that is what it's about."

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