

Fans for all Time

The folks who flipped for 'Friends' created an elaborate world of their own

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

FRIENDS FANS WERE always a breed apart. They didn't just style their hair like

Rachel, decorate their apartment like Monica and greet their friends with Joey's "How you doin'?"

They also went online and created their very own shrines to the show.

Google "Friends" and you'll discover hundreds of fan-created Web sites from Brazil to France and beyond.

As Keith Simanton, the managing editor of the Web site Internet Movie Database, puts it, "You don't see a lot of 'Walker, Texas Ranger' Web sites out there."

"I have a theory about that," says

David Wild, a senior editor for Rolling Stone and the author of two books on the series, including the upcoming "Friends 'Til The End: The Official Celebration of All Ten Years."

"The success of 'Friends' is due to people having a much more intimate connection to the show than any other sitcom in history. There's

a lot of emotion there, not just a series of jokes.

"So this show means more to them. It's much like people have these artificial relationships online that are very real to them."

You'll find so many sites filled with photos and hymns to Phoebe, Joey, Chandler and the rest, not to mention the ubiquitous episode

guides, that it's no surprise to find Web sites simply devoted to linking up to hundreds of other sites about "Friends."

You can even cast your vote, with awards like "10 Elite Friends Sites" and "Toot's Friends Site of the Month."

Chris Thompson of the U.K. has a typical — if especially well-done site — called "The Almost Official Friends Site."

Along with all the usual doodads, Thompson includes complete transcripts of every episode, dialogue from scenes that didn't make the cut, and all of Phoebe's songs, complete with lyrics.

Remember her tune "The Black-out?"

"New York City has no power/
And the milk is getting sour/
But to me it is not scary/'Cause I stay away from dairy."

It's all just a click away.

"The only other comedy that gets that much online attention is 'The Simpsons,'" says Simanton of IMDB.com.

So what will online fans do now?

Some will send their shrines to the Internet graveyard; others will rush to be the early leaders on the "Unofficial Joey Site."

And for the rest, "There will always be syndication," says Wild. ■

