



## HOLIDAY '09: Downtown Ann Arbor retailers see casual Black Friday as many gear up for next week's Midnight Madness

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Louise Love of Scotland shops with friend and Ypsilanti resident Mike Morand at Sam's on Black Friday in downtown Ann Arbor.

Angela Cesere | AnnArbor.com

Sarah Krell was shivering from the chill as she walked beneath ropes of greenery and lights strung through **Nickels Arcade** Friday, but the Ann Arbor resident said she preferred spending the day shopping outdoors for the holiday ambiance.

"We drove out to the mall and drove right back out," Krell said, adding she and her sister who was visiting from out of town were a bit intimidated by the crowds. "I said, 'I'm going to come downtown and enjoy lunch and see the shops and enjoy the first snow.'"

So they bundled up and headed out for some browsing at local retailers, checking out mostly jewelry and clothing.

The pair were among many holiday shoppers looking for a more casual scene downtown on Friday as throngs of seriously energetic discount shoppers flooded larger and national retailers on the outskirts of town.

The downtown Ann Arbor retailers said Black Friday was a strong day for them, even if it's not of the sort seen at malls and big box stores.

Ed Davidson, owner of **Bivouac** on State Street, said the store had been busy for much of the day Friday and traditionally gets that rush on Black Friday. It's hard to say what will happen with sales, he said, but he guessed the store was staying just as busy as it was last year.

He said he's not changing his buying strategy for the holiday season because it's important for customers to feel a store has something new and different and isn't staying too conservative.

Another local clothing retailer also reported strong traffic.

It's a big deal," said Pete Cole, a manager for **Sam's Clothing Store** on Liberty Street.

"Around midday, the store was full of people browsing. The temperatures – and how cold of a season it is -

play a big role in how well the clothing store and its line of coats and warm socks do, he said.

"There are a lot of families who come in. It's a great busy day for the us," he said.

Downtown retailers like **Acme Mercantile** don't get the early morning Black Friday shoppers, but owner Nina Juergens said a steady stream of customers came in much of the day. Usually, Juergens said, the store sees a boost in the week leading up to Thanksgiving but didn't see that bump in sales this year.

Keeping the changing times in mind, Juergens said she pulled back a bit on her holiday-specific inventory and ramped up on smaller-ticket items. She's also offering a gift guide tailored to a variety of budgets and expects a good response from that.



Anna Gunsten, lower left, of Washington D.C., walks with her sister Sarah Krell of Ann Arbor down Nickels Arcade on Black Friday.

Angela Cesere | AnnArbor.com

Acme is one of the stores Ann Arbor resident Nancy Baum was sure to visit as she entertained out-of-town guests on Friday.

"I try to shop locally. I think (the shops are) really cute, and I think it's important," Baum said.

Her group was finding items they liked, but Baum said she was surprised upon visiting another downtown store where inventory seemed to be way down.

"I was wondering if the store was going to close," she said.

Analysts have said consumers should expect to see retailers behave more conservatively this year, ordering less merchandise than they might typically fill their stores with during the holiday season. Shoppers might see stores run out of certain items early in the season, said Ken Dalto, a retail analyst based out of Farmington Hills, and Ed Nakfoor, a retail analyst based in Birmingham.

Ann Arbor area retailers might suffer more than usual because, while they're strong in offering unique items, shoppers are expected to flock to toys, electronics and cheaper, casual clothing - usually stronger categories for big discounters, Dalto said.

People are cutting back on the number of gifts they're giving and are looking to get much of their shopping done in a single location. Michigan shoppers are likely to be more cautious than other regions of the country because more households know or have at least one person who is unemployed and more people have a perception that the regrowth of Michigan's economy is still a long way off, Dalto said.

Moreover, Black Friday is about the deep discounts and not about the local retail scene, Nakfoor said.

"Today is really for the big merchants. They will always be the focus," Nakfoor said. "There will always be the customer that doesn't want the frenetic atmosphere of the big box retailer."