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John T. Grellick / The Detroit News

Elissa Perko shops at Meijer in Warren. Many shoppers are turning to the Internet this holiday season. Story, 6B.

## Attention, shoppers: Get deals right now

Local retailers hope weak economy won't keep gift-givers from spreading cash around.

Dorothy Bourdet / The Detroit News

Advertisement

As a wave of holiday shoppers descends on Metro Detroit stores this morning for the traditional start of the holiday shopping season, southeast Michigan retailers big and small are holding their breath.

They are understandably worried. Sales forecasts for the season are mixed, with some analysts predicting little or no growth in sales over last year for local retailers.

"It's not going to be anything more than that. It's been too many years of this kind of economy," said Kenneth J. Dalto, a Farmington Hills-based retail analyst.

The farther from Metro Detroit, however, the cheerier the outlook: Michigan is expected to see 4.5 percent sales growth, according to a report by the Michigan Retailers Association and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

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Nationally, sales are expected to grow a modest 5 percent over a year ago, according to the National Retail Federation.

"Clearly Michigan is a state that's in transition," said William Strauss, senior economist with Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

The day after Thanksgiving -- termed Black Friday because it is traditionally a time when retailers go from being "in the red," or losing money, to being "in the black," as they rack up sales for the holidays -- is an important bellwether for the rest of the season.

Malls and big-box stores duke it out over discounts, while smaller retailers ply customers with service and one-of-a-kind items.

Sandra Rome, manager of Lotus Imports in Royal Oak, is trying to stay optimistic, but she's planned for a slower season. She hasn't hired as many workers as she usually does for the holidays.

"I really don't think it's going to be quite as busy as past years," she said of the store, which sells men's and women's clothing and accessories, jewelry and gifts.

Rome has also stocked up on cheaper items at the store as people look to get more for less.

"People are more selective in their purchases," she said.

### Midwest is hit the hardest

While consumers have shown resilience as the economy has grown and shrunk in recent years, massive job losses and a stagnant real estate market this year have exacerbated economic difficulties, especially in Michigan, with the highest unemployment rate in the nation at 6.9 percent, and other parts of the Midwest.

Goldman Sachs and other analysts predict layoffs, high gas prices and other economic struggles will hit the Midwest the hardest this holiday shopping season, a period when retailers nationwide usually rack up about 20 percent of their annual revenues.

More than half of Ford Motor Co.'s 35,000 to 40,000 white- and blue-collar job cuts are in the Midwest, and that will be especially challenging to stores such as Kohl's Corp. that have a heavy presence in the region, Goldman Sachs points out in a report to investors.

Strauss points out, however, there could be a short-term silver lining for retailers in the



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John T. Grelick / The Detroit News

Latisha Williams looks at Christmas cards while doing a little advanced holiday shopping Thursday at Meijer in Warren. See full image

### Holiday hours for Metro malls

#### Eastland Center

Vernier Road and I-94, Harper Woods

Today: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

(313) 371-1500

#### Fairlane Town Center

Michigan Avenue and Evergreen Road, Dearborn

Today: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

(313) 593-3330

#### Great Lakes Crossing

Baldwin Road and Joslyn Road, Auburn Hills

Today: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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manufacturing job losses, since many have taken buyouts and may spend some dough for the holidays.

"They got bonuses when they left, so a flood of income has come in," he said.

### How far will dollars stretch?

Shoppers will be looking to stretch that dollar as far as they can, however. Retail experts expect many Metro Detroit shoppers to gravitate toward mega-discounters that offer rock-bottom prices.

"With the current economic climate in Michigan, working families will shop smartly and efficiently by seeking out the large discounts, which are really being offered by big-box retailers," Dalto said.

Even sophisticated wealthier shoppers are realizing that those retailers also have a good selection of quality brands, he said.

High on many shoppers lists will be gift cards, which have exploded in popularity, and the perennial favorite: apparel.

Two-thirds of shoppers plan to buy gift cards this year, up from 57 percent in 2005 and 55 percent in 2004. The number of people planning to buy apparel remained steady at 68 percent in 2006 and 2005, only a slight increase from 66 percent in 2004, according to a survey by American Express.

### Optimism peeks through

Today, with a steely streak of optimism, Patti Brock-Sklar will open the doors to her clothing and accessories boutique in Pleasant Ridge.

"I anticipate that it will be wonderful, that it will all be good, and I will appreciate whatever happens," said Brock-Sklar, who owns Excelsior Couture, a "mini department store" on the east side of Woodward.

That optimism comes even as she admits her store, too, has felt the state's economic woes.

"This was the first year we've really felt that it's trickled down," she said of business. "I get the sense that people are waiting with baited breath and hopeful."

*The Associated Press contributed to this report. You can reach Dorothy Bourdet at (313) 222-2293 or [dbourdet@detnews.com](mailto:dbourdet@detnews.com).*

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Sunday: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
(248) 454-5000

#### Lakeside Mall

Hall Road and Schoenherr, Sterling Heights  
Today: 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

#### Laurel Park Place

37700 W. Six Mile, Livonia

Today: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

(734) 462-1100

(586) 247-1590

#### Macomb Mall

32233 Gratiot

Today: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

(586) 293-7800

#### Northland Center

Eight Mile and Northland Drive, Southfield

Today: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

(586) 569-6272

#### Oakland Mall

14 Mile and I-75, Troy

Today: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

(248) 585-6000

#### Somerset Collection

W. Big Beaver Road and Coolidge, Troy

Today: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

(248) 643-8014

#### Southland Center

Eureka Road and Telegraph Road, Taylor

Today: 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

(734) 374-2800

#### Twelve Oaks

Novi Road and I-96, Novi

Today: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

(248) 348-9400

#### Universal Mall

Dequindre Road and 12 Mile, Warren

Today: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Sunday: 12-5 p.m.

(586) 751-3161

#### Westland Center

Wayne Avenue and Warren Road, Westland

Today: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

(734) 421-0291

Source: Detroit News research