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Saturday, November 25, 2006

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Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

James Miller is the first to get a crack at a \$250 laptop at Best Buy in Auburn Hills. He got there at 5 a.m. Thanksgiving Day.

Black Friday takes on shades of green

Lured by discounts, shoppers kick off season with a bang

Dorothy Bourdet and Jennifer Youssef / The Detroit News

Advertisement

SOUTHFIELD -- With their holiday ads tucked securely in their pockets, Faye McConnell and Deborah Baxter stood outside Best Buy in Southfield at 4 a.m. Friday.

The Detroit sisters' yearly day-after-Thanksgiving shopping tradition calls for thick parkas, thick pocketbooks and really thick skins as they fend off would-be line cutters for 14 hours in the cold.

"It like, geeks you up for the holiday," said Baxter, 50, cheerfully clutching a handful of vouchers for a plasma TV, computer, laptop, digital camera and two MP3 players.

Baxter and her sister gave up a good part of their Thanksgiving Day to shop -- they arrived at Best Buy at 2:30 p.m. Thursday -- but the deals were well worth it if you were first in line, they say.

"We're kicking off the holiday with a bang," McConnell said. "We save a lot of money." From Southgate to Southfield, thousands of shoppers rose Friday well before their turkey

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dinner had properly digested to kick off the holiday shopping season. By most accounts, it was a strong Day 1. Numerous malls, big box stores and specialty shops reported heavy traffic and good sales.

"We're hearing from stores all over the country that it's busier than last year," said Karen MacDonald, director of communications for The Taubman Company, which owns Twelve Oaks Mall, Great Lakes Crossing and Fairlane Town Center.

The day after Thanksgiving -- called Black Friday because it's when retailers typically go from being "in the red" or losing money to being "in the black" or making money -- isn't the busiest shopping day of the season anymore, but it's still a big one, and it sets the tone for the overall season, retailers say.

What consumers see that day influences where they will shop for the rest of the season.

At Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn, about 300 people waited in line for Macy's to open at 6 a.m. Friday. In Sterling Heights, more than 600 shoppers were waiting for the doors to open at a Sears store.

The line at the Southfield Best Buy stretched the length of the building and disappeared around it as people waited for its 5 a.m. opening. At Lakeside Mall in Sterling Heights, the parking lot was 90 percent to 95 percent full before noon.

Electronics and children's clothing were among the hot sellers reported by Taubman shopping centers. Kmart and Sears saw strong sales of MP3 players, LCD TVs, DVDs and tools such as cordless drills. Lakeside Mall KB Toys manager Tom Larner said sales were up from a year ago, thanks to top sellers like Kid-Tough Digital Cameras, which was on the company's list of this year's hottest toys.

Will sales boom last?

Michigan retailers forecast a 4.5 percent increase in holiday sales over last year, according to the Michigan Retailers Association and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

But local retail analysts are less optimistic for Metro Detroit stores, saying sales could be bruised by layoffs and cutbacks by Detroit's Big Three automakers, with little or no holiday sales growth from last year.

"Early indications (show) a very strong weekend," said Kenneth J. Dalto, a

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Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Betty Green, left, and Dana Green-Carter get comfortable as they wait in line to pay for their purchases at Best Buy in Southfield. The line at the store stretched the length of the building and disappeared around it as people waited for its 5 a.m. opening. See full image

Holiday hours for Metro malls

Eastland Center

Vernier Road and I-94, Harper Woods

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

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

(248) 454-5000

Lakeside Mall

Hall Road and Schoenherr, Sterling Heights

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

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

Laurel Park Place

37700 W. Six Mile, Livonia

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

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Farmington Hills retail analyst.

"However, as time goes on and the discounts don't stay the same, you're not going to have the kind of level of sales that you are going to have this weekend."

If retailers decide to continue the discounts and exchange sales for earnings, however, the sales season for the holidays could have a very different showing, he said.

"They may go with the strategy: Forget the earnings, let's go with volume," he said. That would boost sales, but could hurt profits long term.

As far as shopper Nancy Landen of Franklin was concerned, an abundance of cashiers waiting for customers at the Southfield Target early Friday was an indication that times are tough for a lot of Michiganians.

"This is scary," she exclaimed as she pushed her cart up to the checkout lane and found nine cashiers waiting. "It's a really a bad sign of the economy."

Shopping a family tradition

For mom-and-daughter team Margaret Gaston and Shamona Wafer of Detroit, Black Friday is as much about bonding as shopping. One year, they camped out on futons in Meijer, chatting with other customers while they waited for Schwinn bikes to go on sale.

But don't be fooled. These are serious shoppers. The two have a tried-and-true strategy for getting what they want on Black Friday.

"Plan your route. That's the key because you're dealing with time frames," Wafer said.

"You gotta go into the store and get only what you want, although you may be tempted to look at other items," Gaston added.

Above all, be patient, they said.

"Other shoppers get annoyed, but not us," Gaston said. "You have to be courteous."

The anti-social should steer clear of Black Friday, said Laurie Cohen, an Oak Park mom, who stood with others for about nine and a half hours outside a Southfield Office Depot to get a laptop computer for \$299.

"You have to like people. You meet people, you get to talk, learn about a lot of different cultures," Cohen said.

Things could get ugly

That friendly feeling, though, can vanish

Sunday: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
 (734) 462-1100
 (586) 247-1590

Macomb Mall
 32233 Gratiot

Today: 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.
 Sunday: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
 (586) 569-6272

Oakland Mall

14 Mile and I-75, Troy
 Today: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.
 Sunday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
 (248) 585-6000

Somerset Collection

West Big Beaver Road and Coolidge, Troy
 Today: 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: 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: 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.
 Sunday: 12-5 p.m.
 (586) 751-3161

Westland Center

Wayne Avenue and Warren Road, Westland
 Today: 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.
 Sunday: 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 (734) 421-0291

Source: Detroit News research

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Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News
 Manager Todd Williams pumps up his

when the doors slide open and shoppers make a beeline for the items they're coveting.

Four police officers stood just inside the Southfield Best Buy, warning shoppers to behave themselves as they flooded into the store.

Jacque Bourgeois, a 32-year-old mother of three from Windsor, had to diffuse a squabble that broke out in a Troy Wal-Mart as eight women grabbed for three remaining Moon Sand toys.

"I was shoved a lot today, but you just grin and bear it," said Bourgeois, as she waited in an hour-long line to check-out at Kohl's in Troy. "You have to share."

If you want to have a good shopping experience, said Kay Elliott of Harrison Township, who held a game and DVDs as she stood in the checkout line 100 people deep at a Clinton Township Target, you can't get frustrated.

"You have to have a good attitude," Elliott said, "because the lines are long and sometimes they don't have what you want. If I don't get what I want, it's not the end of the world."

Playing the waiting game

A long line is worth the savings for Ronnie Porter of Detroit. He wanted to buy only one sale item at Best Buy in Roseville, but he was willing to wait an hour in the checkout line. "I knew I was going to have to be real patient."

Not everyone was. Some shoppers who had their carts and arms full of items dumped their load and walked out when they saw how long the line was.

Laura Mayes and her son Tom Bosley, both of Roseville, went to Target with the intention of buying a video game on sale, but when they saw the line of people standing outside, they ditched their plan and went to nearby Kerby's Koney Island for breakfast instead.

"I said 'forget it,' " Mayes said. "I would rather pay an extra \$20 for it somewhere else."

Canadians check out deals

Canada can't beat the deals Metro Detroit offers, though, said Trish Allsop, a 26-year-old who has come from Kingsville, Ontario, to shop on Black Friday ever since she was a kid.

"When you guys have a sale over here, it's a real sale," said Allsop, as she took a shopping break for tea and a bagel at about 8:30 a.m. at Panera Bread in Troy.

"We look forward to it; it's a rush I guess you would say," said Allsop, who estimated she would spend \$500.

Sales won't be like last year

employees at 4 a.m., an hour before the Auburn Hills Best Buy opened to early shoppers. See full image



Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

Ebony McDonald and Alan Bunney check out DVDs before the goods are put on the shelves at Best Buy in Southfield. See full image

Season opener

The weekend after Thanksgiving accounted for nearly 10 percent of all holiday sales in 2005.

Weekly distribution of 2005 holiday sales

Nov. 20-26	14.9%
Nov. 27-Dec. 3	13.7
Dec. 4-10	15.1
Dec. 11-17	17.7
Dec. 18-24	23.0
Dec. 25-31	15.6

Weekend after Thanksgiving* 9.6% *Nov. 25-27

Source: International Council of Shopping Centers
Associated Press

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Every dollar -- Canadian or otherwise -- spent during Black Friday is another small boost for retailers who are hoping they won't see a dip in spending this year.

Last year, total Black Friday sales fell 0.9 percent to \$8 billion from the year before, dampened by deep discounting, according to Shopper Trak RCT Corp., which tracks sales at more than 45,000 mall-based retail outlets. For the Thanksgiving weekend, total sales rose 0.4 percent to \$16.8 billion.

Even so, merchants ended up meeting their holiday sales projections, helped by a last-minute buying surge and post-Christmas shopping.

This year, analysts expect robust holiday sales gains for the industry, though the pace is expected to be slower than a year ago. The National Retail Federation projects a 5 percent gain in total holiday sales for the November-December period, less than the 6.1 percent in the year-ago period.

Meanwhile, the International Council of Shopping Centers estimates sales at stores open at least a year will rise 3 percent in the November-December period, less than last year's 3.6 percent.

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

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