

BUSINESS

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Black Friday warriors' motto: Ready, set, shop — then drop

Melissa Burden / The Detroit News

The Black Friday bargain-hunting assignments in Nicole Brown's family are divvied up over cake and coffee on Thanksgiving Day.

It has become a tradition for Brown; her husband, Daryl, 32; her brother; sister; and other family members during the past few years. The shopping plans mean getting up hours before dawn on the day after Thanksgiving — or not going to bed at all.

“We kind of divide and conquer,” Brown, 30, of Troy said this week as she tended to her first-born, Sophia, 10 weeks old. “We all make lists of what we want in each store, and each person goes to a different store and tries to get everything on the list.”

Brown and her family are among the 31 percent of households expected to shop on Black Friday, according to a poll by the International Council of Shopping Centers and Goldman Sachs. That projection is up from 26 percent in 2009.

And Black Friday or Bargain Friday sales are expected to improve. One survey by consulting company BDO USA predicts Black Friday sales to jump 3.8 percent from last year.

For the whole holiday season, the Michigan Retailers Association forecasts a sales increase of 6 percent over last year, while a survey for the National Retailers Federation forecasts a 2.3 percent jump



Nicole Brown prepares for Black Friday. "It's a lot of fun and it kind of kicks off the holidays and puts you in a good mood," she says. (Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News)

Pent-up demand

"There's two years of pent-up demand," said retail analyst Ken Dalto in Farmington Hills, describing 2008 and 2009, when Metro Detroit was hard-hit with layoffs and workers who had hours cut. "When people feel confident and have a little more money coming in, they'll spend more."

In other years, Brown has stayed up all night, braved the crowds and been in line at 1 a.m. to snag flat-screen TVs on sale at 5 a.m. But this year she is planning to be at Target about an hour before it opens at 4 a.m.

Brown said she's interested in the Wii Fit Plus bundle for \$67 at Target. She also plans to look for cheap movies and pick up toys for charity "because they're great deals."

She and her husband, who takes the day off from his banking job, then plan to go to Lowe's for tools on sale and Macy's to look at luggage sets, bath towels and other household items.

"Usually I shop for myself and for Christmas presents," Nicole Brown said, adding she expects to get about half of her holiday shopping done today. "I ask what people want beforehand."

While they'll stop to drop off bags and boxes, there's no real rest from shopping for Brown or her family. This afternoon, they plan to head up north to Long Lake near Hale, but not until they stop at the Birch Run Premium Outlets to check out stores such as Coach for a few hours, she said.

"You can find deals all day," she said, adding on Saturday they usually hit the Tanger Outlet Center in West Branch, too.

Black Friday a tradition

The Black Friday shopping tradition began about four years ago when someone in the family wanted a smartphone and they got up early and stood in line and found it fun, Nicole Brown said.

"You get a lot of great energy from people," she said. "I haven't really run into anybody who's mean-hearted. It's a lot of fun and it kind of kicks off the holidays and puts you in a good mood."

"Now, after turkey and fixings and some Italian fare, the family pores over the ads (though they've already seen some of the leaked deals) and decide who goes where."

"Nobody's allowed to look at them till after dinner," she said of her mom's family of about 20 who gather for Thanksgiving.

"We kind of take the papers and circle what that person wants," said Brian Greaves, the 28-year-old brother of Nicole who lives in Washington Township and works in the auto industry.

"We're usually on our cellphones reminding each other to wake up or (to update on) what's available or not available, and there's usually a Plan B," said Brian Greaves, who added that he plans to be in line before 6 a.m. at either Home Depot or Lowe's, looking for steep discounts on name-brand tools.

People are driven to stand in line in the cold for the "tremendous" discounts retailers give on Black Friday and to ensure they get the must-have toy or gadget before inventories run out, said Dalto, who predicts Michigan retail sales will be up between 1 percent and 2 percent this holiday shopping season.

Best deals on TV sets

Nicole Brown said the best Black Friday deals have been on television sets. One year at Meijer, the family snagged a couple of 20-inch Sylvania LCD TVs for \$99 each, down from their regular price of \$329. They've also gotten a 42-inch LCD TV for \$400, less than half of its \$849 regular sticker, she said.

In all the sales hoopla, she once even bought two vacuums because she was "getting such a good deal." She ended up giving one to her mom, Cynthia Greaves, she said.

"You just go there with the intentions that if I get it, it'll be good, but if not, it's not the end of the world," she said. "I don't take it that seriously, but I've never had a bad experience yet."

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