

The Detroit News

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Metro Final

Black Friday's deals lure Metro shoppers in droves



Photos by Charles V. Times / The Detroit News

A crowd goes for the DVDs at the Auburn Hills Best Buy, where the doors opened at 5 a.m. Friday with many shoppers already in line.

Sales appear strong, but analysts expect rest of season to be flat

BY JACLYN TROP AND JENNIFER YOUSSEF
The Detroit News

Metro Detroiters filled local malls and shopping centers Friday for the traditional start of the holiday shopping season, but some experts warn that traffic may not remain brisk through the weekend, despite ongoing discounts, or for the rest of the season.

Sales and foot traffic figures won't be available until today, but in Metro Detroit, Friday's numbers seemed to be on par with last year's levels, said retail analyst Kenneth J. Dalto of Kenneth J. Dalto & Associates.

The day is a seasonal shopping anomaly because of the deep discounts and extended store hours, and not necessarily a harbinger, he said.

More online: Browse a photo gallery of Black Friday shopping at detnews.com/business.



Nationally, retailers suffered the worst sales decline in several decades last holiday season, but the good news is that they're heading into the 2009 Christmas selling period armed with lean inventories and more practical goods on their shelves that reflect shoppers' new psyche.

With the U.S. unemployment rate at 10.2 percent in October and Michigan's jobless rate at 15.1 percent, and consumers struggling with tight credit, many analysts expect total holiday sales to be about even with a year ago.

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At Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, shoppers load up on bargains on Black Friday.

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Shoppers

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"If Black Friday is any indication," said Laura Conrad, president of comparison shopping Web site PriceGrabber.com, "it looks like people shopped earlier this year, or maybe they're holding out until later for bigger discounts."

Dalto said a lot of people shopping Friday probably weren't buying presents but were buying for themselves because of the "knock-your-socks-off" discounts on clothing, toys and electronics.

"Price-driven shopping" is a symptom of the economy, Dalto said. "People are shopping prudently. Ultimately, I think the season will be down overall compared to last year."

Stores took extra precautions to control the throngs after a Wal-Mart worker on Long Island was trampled to death last year.

But police were called to a Wal-Mart store in the Upland, Calif. The store shut down for more than two hours after customers inside caused a ruckus. There were no arrests.

Tampa-area television station WTSP reported a brief fight at a Brandon Wal-Mart between shoppers seeking GPS devices. And in Seminole County, Florida, three law enforcement agencies were called to a Wal-Mart fight there, according to WKMG-TV.

Full lots, good discounts

Traffic was mixed Friday at Metro Detroit shopping centers and malls. There were long lines in some places as consumers took a shot at landing the deepest discounts. Elsewhere, crowds were big, but not overpowering.

Star Kennedy of Oxford said she arrived at The Somerset Collection in Troy around 1 p.m. and was lucky to find a parking space.

She and her mom, Pam Rulason of Lake Orion, had been out since 5 a.m. hitting retailers, including Home Depot, Meijer, Kohl's, Target, Old Navy and Bath & Body Works.

"It's been good," Kennedy said. "I have no complaints."

Mall marketing director Linda McIntosh said the day got off to a busier start this year, necessitating off-site parking by 1 p.m.

"It's amazing — a lot of traffic and a lot, a lot of bags," she said.



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

People got in line as early as 9 p.m. Thursday for the 5 a.m. Friday opening at the Auburn Hills Best Buy.

Hottest sellers

Big-screen, flat-screen TVs

Nintendo Wii

Coats

Board games and miscellaneous toys

Basic white dress shirts

Cashmere sweaters

Retro-looking cookware

Max Mara black coats

Anything from Apple

Leather handbags from Gucci and Louis Vuitton

Hot sellers were "kind of back to basics," McIntosh said. "It's everything you can put in your closet and work around."

Sales and traffic seemed better than last year at the mall's Restoration Hardware, associate manager Andrew Lemke said.

"It's 70 percent gifts and the rest are personal purchases," Lemke said, crediting the store's Black Friday success to its offer of \$100 off every \$500 purchase of full-price merchandise.

'More for my money'

By 11 a.m. at Twelve Oaks mall in Novi, crowds were strong.

But Patricia Scott of Detroit believes the lines were shorter, and said it was easier to find parking.

"I don't think there are as many people out this year," said Scott, who arrived at 6:30 a.m.

Amy Lowe of Hadley, shopping with her daughters at Twelve Oaks, said there also were fewer

big deals on specific products.

But Lowe was pleased to find numerous blanket discounts and seemingly lower prices.

"I feel like I'm getting more for my money this year," she said.

At Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills, store managers reported strong sales for Victoria's Secret apparel, Coach handbags and Nike sneakers, according to spokeswoman Karen MacDonald. The first shopper arrived at 10:50 p.m. Thursday and waited at Sports Authority, which gave up to \$20 to the first 100 shoppers. By 4:15 a.m., there were nearly 100 people in line for the sporting goods store and the nearby Bass Pro Shop.

The first in line at the Best Buy in Roseville, at Gratiot and 13 Mile, were Claudette Morgan and her husband, Alex Harrell.

The couple staked their spot outside the electronics retailer at 3 p.m. Wednesday in hopes of snagging \$500 laptop computer vouchers for their kids.

Claudette left work at 1 p.m.

"It's fun now. It's a tradition. It's exciting to see if you can get the deals."

Sarah Davis of Piqua, Ohio

Wednesday and joined her husband under a tarp outside the store.

The couple weathered the night using a kerosene heater and portable toilets provided by Best Buy.

For Claudette, the deals were worth it.

"I enjoy it," she said.

"I don't," countered her weary husband.

The couple drank free hot chocolate passed out by Rob Rice, general manager of a nearby Hooters, and a few waitresses.

"I've been here before and I know what it's like," Rice said.

Several would-be shoppers took one glimpse of the line, got back into their cars and left.

Among them were Rodrick Shaffer and his wife, Sonia, who arrived just after the doors opened at 5 a.m.

"I looked at it, and it's like, nah, it's not worth it," Rodrick Shaffer said.

'It's a tradition'

At the Meijer store at Tel-Twelve mall in Southfield, beary-eyed deal seekers made a beeline for electronics and some left with big-screen TVs in their carts.

Sarah Davis of Piqua, Ohio, was in line at Tel-Twelve by 4 a.m., and already had checked Toys 'R Us and Meijer off her list.

"It's a tradition. It's exciting to see if you can get the deals."

The day started quietly at Eastland Center in Harper Woods.

That suited Darren D'Angelo and Randy Farb of Ferndale, as they shopped at Macy's for towels to buy for D'Angelo's mother. "I like to get a good deal, but I'm not one of those loonies who camps

out all night," D'Angelo said.

As the morning wore on, more shoppers turned out, and many carried multiple bags through the mall, where they said they found good deals.

Amanda Rogers of Warren dragged her friend Lori McFadden of Center Line out at 5 a.m. to shop at Eastland.

"You buy more than you really want," McFadden protested, pointing to a cart full of toys for her kids.

But, Rogers cheered, "Good deals rock."

Associated Press contributed.

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