



Brandon Hayes, 21, left, and Chance Conrad, 20, check out clothes at the renovated Novi Macy's store, which is 60,000-square-foot larger, has improved lighting, wider aisles and added services. (Madalyn Ruggiero / Special to The Detroit News)

Friday, October 3, 2008

Macy's ready to unveil store upgrade in Novi

Expansion, renovation project at Twelve Oaks will follow at retailer's other outlets in Mich.

Jennifer Youssef / The Detroit News

NOVI -- After nearly two years of putting up with pounding hammers and flying dust, shoppers at Macy's at Twelve Oaks Mall can now enjoy one of the department store chain's most modern and updated stores in the country.

Macy's is wrapping up a 60,000-square-foot expansion and renovation project that includes improved lighting, wider aisles, a new Starbucks cafe, eateries, a salon and spa, a bigger cosmetics department and more room for new lines of apparel. Macy's officials declined to say how much the project cost.

Shoppers will notice the layout and merchandise mix of the 303,000-square-foot store also is new, a result of the company's push to customize individual stores based on local demographics. Detroit is one of about 20 markets across the country where Macy's is customizing its stores to reflect local customers' choices for style and brands.

"We've changed how we are doing business," Hank Lorant, district vice president for the 11 Metro Detroit stores, said Thursday while visiting the Novi store before its formal grand reopening Saturday.

The retailer is customizing the layout of all its 22 stores in Michigan, a process that started with the Novi store because it needed the most work. Macy's would not discuss the cost of reconfiguring stores but noted the fact it's

investing in the Metro Detroit market is a sign the company has high hopes for growth in the region.

"We have huge faith in the Detroit market," he said. "We truly believe this is a market where we can grow our business."

Customizing stores is a good strategy, especially in an economic climate in which retailers are being battered by rising costs and budget-minded consumers, said Ken Dalto, a Farmington Hills retail analyst.

Intense competition makes the retail environment tricky and companies need to do something unique to break out of the pack, he said. Macy's has a good foothold in the Detroit retail market but the company has been slow to realize the importance of giving customers what they want. Its new plan is an indicator Macy's is beginning to understand that it has to be customer centered, he said.

"It's a very good strategy," Dalto said, "but they have to stick with it. It takes years for people to change their shopping habits."

Customer service, apparel selection and all other aspects of the Novi store have vastly improved since Macy's implemented the new strategy in April, said Kevin Hoen, vice president and manager of the Twelve Oaks store.

"The reaction time to customers' needs is much quicker," he said.

Shopping at the Novi store on Thursday, Sue Junkulis of South Lyon said she found the new layout confusing to navigate. However, she said she likes how much brighter the store is and its more up-to-date feel.

"Overall, it was a good thing," she said.

Mary Katola of Brighton takes her grandchildren to Macy's on Thursdays. They shop for clothes and then enjoy a treat at the Taste Bar, a new snack bar where customers can dine at small tables.

"The transition was a little hard, but it's good now," she said. "I like it a lot."