

# 'Tis the season to go shopping

By Mary Rodrigue  
special writer

WITH SOME OF the busiest shopping days of the season still ahead, merchants are reporting early Christmas sales up as much as 20 percent over last year in an informal random survey conducted at several area shopping centers last week.

More people back to work and a new confidence in the economy were cited by merchants as reasons for the apparent boom.

"We're probably running 15 percent ahead of last year," said Michael Mazzoni, who operates the family-owned Orin Jewelers in Garden City with his brother, Orin Jr., and sister, Joyce Pappas.

"Jewelry is often impulse buying," he said. "A few years ago, a customer Christmas shopping would stay in a certain budget and keep to it. Now, they're often willing to spend more. We are doing more remounts, more custom designing."

"We've had more men coming in this year by themselves. They're buying watches, diamond pendants, earrings, dinner rings. Men buying for women are our bigger ticket items."

"December is also our biggest month for weddings. We're selling lots of engagement ring sets."

Mazzoni said customers are buying both inexpensive and costly jewelry. "We have a gold filled line that starts at \$20. And at the other end, dinner rings from \$300 to \$15,000. We try to cater to everybody."

LESS TRADITIONAL gift merchandise is also moving well this holiday season. Wild Wings wildlife art gallery in downtown Plymouth reports higher volume sales on merchandise which includes sporting gift items, porcelain, duck decoys, and animal and nature theme paintings.

"On Sundays, we pull in people from Flint, Kalamazoo, Oakland and Macomb counties," said Patricia Mosher, manager.

Novelty items include a duck phone that quacks instead of rings, a wooden toy duck that flaps wings and walks as it's pulled, and a Christmas tree decorated entirely in duck decoys.

"It's worth a trip just to see, if nothing else," Mosher said.

Specialty foods and imported wines are gaining popularity with gift givers. The Cheese and Wine Barn in down-

town Plymouth "is doing the best (holiday) business in the three years I've been here," said manager Lois Remer.

Remer says the store will ship food baskets throughout the United States and will deliver them in the metro Detroit area. Although the store deals with big volume customers who may want 50 food baskets, personnel are willing to go that extra mile for buyers who may want to special order a single bottle of wine.

In addition to wine, specialty chocolates from Holland and Switzerland, caviar, escargot, imported candies and 55 different cheeses fill the store. The Cheese and Wine Barn also carries products related to coffee, tea, drinks and food, like kettles, grinders, glasses, knives and decorative tins.

ARTIFICIAL TREES are another item gaining favor with holiday shoppers, according to Ken Wright, garden department manager at Meljer Thrifty Acres in Canton Township.

"Although I don't have the sales figures available, business is at least as good as last year," Wright said. "Artificial trees are becoming more realistic looking with shorter needles and fuller branches."

Garlands, icicles, lights and other decorative trim are also moving well, Wright said.

Fannie Farmer Candles at Westland Center reports business up 12 percent over last year.

"It has been excellent," said Carolyn LaBruzzi, manager. "I think in general there's more confidence in the economy this year."

When the franchise was purchased last June 1 by the French Poulin Co., two new lines were added, she said. They are: a heritage collection of chocolate, praline, orange and coffee flavor candy retailing for \$9.95 and \$13.95 and 8-ounce jars of jelly for \$4.95 featuring all natural apricot, black currant, grapefruit and plum.

The biggest seller remains boxed chocolates ranging from \$5.95 to \$20.75 a pound, LaBruzzi said. A new line of stocking stuffers and a special offer on the Fannie Farmer cookbook or bakebook (\$2 off the regular price plus a free pound of chocolates with every purchase) are special lures this season.

SALES WERE UP 53 percent for the week following Thanksgiving at Musicland in Westland, according to Cindy Priksorn, store spokeswoman.

"The weekends are always busy, then business slows Monday-Wednesday," she said. "We'll have continuous sales through Christmas."

In addition to cassette tapes and top 10 albums, large gadgety radios are a hot selling item.

Shoppers can view real craftsmen at work at Dip & Carve Candles in the Livonia Mall. Although most observers were watching and not buying on a recent weekday afternoon, managers Ken Stringer and Sam Tringali say business is great.

"I was surprised by the number of people who collect candles," Tringali said.

Their candle assortment, ranging from \$1 to \$150, for 12 pounds of wax molded into a tree stump crawling with colorful gnomes, appears more decorative than practical.

Customers can have a candle custom-made in their favorite color and watch the process, which includes dipping a plain chunky candle into hot colored wax to create a thick coat, cooking it in water 15 minutes, then carving ribbon-like designs as the candle is suspended by its wick.

"We wrap and box them in foam padding at no extra cost," Stringer said. "So far, we've shipped them to California and Florida."

A FEW STORES away, Dolly Hubbard of the sausage-and-cheese-stocked Swiss Colony expected business to pick up following distribution of 55,000 weekend circulars.

"Every Christmas I sell out of everything," said Hubbard, who also manages a store in Southfield's Tel-Twelve Mall. "Food gifts are making a bigger impact the past few years. It's better than giving someone a shirt he'll never wear."

Kay-Bee Toys manager Mark Wing said his biggest problem is keeping popular toys in stock. Right now the hottest item is Transformers — robots that turn into cars and are popular with both boys and girls.

"We don't have any Cabbage Patch dolls, but hopefully we'll get some in stock before Christmas," he said. "We don't carry a waiting list."

Gobots, a competitor to Transformers, and Masters of the Universe are also popular with shoppers in the Livonia Mall store.

"Any trivia game is a big seller," he said. "We've got rock trivia, Bible trivia, Trivial Pursuit — you name it."



photos by DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Joshua Speelman, 4½, of Farmington Hills investigates the shelves of the Kay-Bee Toy Store in

Livonia Mall where the hottest toys are robots which turn into cars.

## No trivial pursuit

### Buyers hunt for holiday gifts

By Mary Rodrigue  
special writer

It was three weeks before Christmas and all through the mall, Scuds of shoppers were buying almost anything at all. Parcels were slung from their shoulders with care. And a festive holiday mood filled the air.

THE SIGHTS AND sounds of the winter holidays were everywhere on a recent afternoon in Livonia Mall. Despite the blustery cold weather outside, Santa Claus was warming the hearts of children inside the mall. The man in the red suit and Christmas Carol, his right hand woman, had a snake line of moms and lots waiting for a private audience to be duly recorded by a photographer for \$3.99 a picture.

The center of the mall was dotted with merchants selling giftware ranging from made-to-order candles to jewelry, stuffed toys and fuzzy red stockings to hang by the fireplace on Christmas Eve.

"I ENJOY SHOPPING, I really do," said Laurie Dimmitt, of Detroit.

She had her parents-in-law and 15-month-old daughter, Lisa, along to shop for a sport jacket and slacks for her husband.

"I've been Christmas shopping 10 times already and I'm about half done now. I've got 14 people to buy for."

"I definitely don't plan on finishing today," she said, with a not-too-disappointed smile.

Helen Collins of Farmington had success finding skirts at Crowley's and planned to have lunch at the mall before heading home.

"I find the prices in general a bit higher this year," she said. "So I expect to spend a little more."

On her Christmas giving list are a couple of teenage grandchildren and an 8- and 10-year-old.

"Oh, I never have a hard time buying for them," she said. "I give practical gifts like socks and bathrobes."

JOE KROL of Redford had a method of shopping that ensured he wouldn't be worn out by the end of the day.

"I drive my wife around to the malls and give her all the money. She does the shopping. She's almost done with it."

"I can't walk around a lot because of my health," he explained, resting on a bench near Kresge's.

Richard Murphy of Redford also preferred to let his wife do the shopping. He was keeper of the parcels as she scouted from store to store.

"We always look around at the different stores and can usually find 25 percent off on any given item," he said.

Murphy was a touch disappointed to find Trivial Pursuit selling for a dollar less at Kay-Bee Toys than what he paid for it elsewhere.



"I've mostly bought clothes, and toys, of course," said Gretchen Gulsbert of Farmington, as she shops with daughter Kelsey.

"Oh well, it's just a dollar," he laughed. "I first played the game at my son's house and had the best time. I bought it for myself."

Two pre-school age grandchildren and a daughter and son-in-law are also beneficiaries of the Murphy's gift-giving.

NEARBY, GRETCHEN Gulsbert of Farmington explained why a movie camera was the most expensive but important item on her list.

"We want to take pictures of Kelsey," she said, bouncing her almost 9-month-old daughter on her lap. "She was recently in a baby pageant sponsored by the Elks."

Gulsbert said her Christmas shopping is just about wrapped up this year.

"I've bought mostly clothes, and toys, of course," she added.

Keith Leveson of Redford looked overwhelmed but delighted inside Kay-Bee Toys. Parents Morry and Pat brought their 19-month-old son shopping to buy him a toy.

"We don't celebrate Christmas," Morry said. "But we buy Keith things all the time." The little guy finally settled on a Fisher-Price toy xylophone.

Down another aisle in the crowded store, Marilyn Hays, a Wayne resident, pushed a stroller and admitted she was just getting started with her holiday shopping.

"The kids are bigger and they want more expensive gifts," she said. "I haven't taken advantage of any sales but I find the prices are about the same as last year."

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