

Merchants generally happy with season

By Michele Glance
staff writer

The season of giving has blessed Downtown Farmington businesses with prosperity.

While a few local stores had Christmas sales slower than expected, most shopkeepers and managers agreed sales were up from last year.

Shaker and fur-blend sweaters, holiday dresses, pearls, gold herringbone chains, dress shoes, computers, VCRs, video equipment, long wool coats, Guess jeans, Jordache jeans, a brass candle that automatically lights when lifted, antique clocks and zoo shoes children's tennis shoes with animals on them) are among the popular items. Santa who shopped in Farmington selected to put under the Christmas tree.

Teddy bear items were also hot locally. A mitten decorated with a teddy bear designed to be worn over a glove when pumping gas, Furskin teddy bears and teddy bear slippers were all popular.

"Sales have been real good," said Jeff Sorice, assistant manager of Farmington House records. "This is my third Christmas here and it seems to be the busiest one. I'd say sales are up maybe 7 percent."

SONISE THOUGHT early shopping might be a factor in the increased sales. "It seems like people are out shopping earlier," he said. "There don't seem to be as many people waiting until the last few days and that's a good trend for everybody."

Don Wilson, owner of Wilson's Jewelers, said sales were up "quite a bit. I'd say they were up 25 to 30 percent," Wilson said. "The economy's better, people are making good money."

Personalized service, free gift wrapping and an attractive store win-

dow display were some of the factors that Wilson said helped his store compete with large shopping malls.

Liz Clark, manager of Tempo Fashion, said sales at the women's clothing store haven't gone as well as expected. "Maybe more people are going to malls because they don't have to go in and out," she said.

Dressy, holiday sweaters were the best-selling item at the store, Clark said.

AT JO ANN'S Fabrics, baskets, craft items and holiday ribbons were the most popular purchases.

LeeAnn Bracken, manager, thought the fact that Thanksgiving came a week later than usual this year may have hurt holiday sales. But having a pre-Christmas clearance sale boosted sales at the fabric store, she added.

At Shoe Town, sales are up by 45 percent, said Tressa McCowan, manager. She attributed the increased business to a special sale where shoes for the entire family were priced from \$8 to \$14.

Because of the promotion, dress shoes sold well, she said.

The holiday season at Radio Shack was "just great," said Tim Strzalkowski, manager. "It's been terrific," he said. "I would say we've done twice as good as last year."

Computers continue to be a popular gift for children, Strzalkowski said.

"People are moving away from buying the cheaper models just to get the kids into computers," he said. "Instead they're looking at it as an investment because they realize computers are here to stay and they want a system that's going to be able to expand."

AT HIT or Miss, sales were better in October and November than they were close to Christmas, said Felicia Jackson, assistant manager.

Dressy holiday sweaters and blue jeans were the biggest sellers and color played a key role in what sold. "Multi-colored, bright sweaters and pale pastels are really popular," Jackson said. At Pier One Imports, manager Jeff Frushour said the Christmas season has been a "rollercoaster ride."

When asked if Thanksgiving coming a week late might account for the rollercoaster effect, Frushour said it seemed that "gals got their shopping done early this year but with guys, it wouldn't matter if Thanksgiving came in July, they'd still be in here on Dec. 24 doing their shopping."

Kathy Verstraete, manager of the Dress Barn, said there has been a 15-20 percent increase in sales from last year. "Sales have gone fairly good," she said. "They're definitely better than last year."

FANCIER HOLIDAY dresses and long wool coats were the bestsellers at the women's clothing store.

"I think a lot of people did their holiday shopping earlier this year," Verstraete said. "There were a lot of people that were already done by Thanksgiving."

Sales were "definitely up" at the Children's Shoe Mart, said manager Linda Greenfield. Besides teddy bear slippers and zoo shoes, boys high top tennis shoes were big sellers.

Since the Children's Warehouse just opened in March, it couldn't compare sales to last year. However, manager Judy Robles said sales seem to be going well.

Santa visited the store for two weeks before Christmas so children could get pictures taken with him for free. "That drew a lot of people because they didn't have to wait in line in the mall," Robles said.

Besides Jordache jeans, long tops with stirrup pants have been a big seller for girls. "As far as price goes, we really can't compete with us," Robles said. "But when you go to the mall, everything's there so it's a matter of convenience. And that's what hurts us this time of year."

IN THE Wooden Heart shop in the Village Mall, business is "doing fine," said Ruth Prentice, one of the owners. "Our sales are up from last year because more people know we're here," Prentice said.

A brass candlestick that automatically lights up when lifted has proven so popular, it has had to be reordered several times, Prentice said. "We try to order a wide variety of Christmas items," Prentice said. "So we always have new things coming in."

At Country Miniature, a store in the Village Mall specializing in doll houses, owners John and Dorothy Siano were up all night Dec. 23 putting together doll houses.

"The last three days have been hysterical," Dorothy Siano said. "It's been fun, but we've been busy, busy, busy."

By Christmas Eve, Dorothy Siano said the shop had "just about run out" of tiny doll house furniture.

AT PERRY'S Clock Shop, Owner Perry Swartz said while the dollar amount of sales in his shop was up, the

average customer was spending less than last year. "We get a lot of customers that want to spend \$20 rather than \$40," Swartz said.

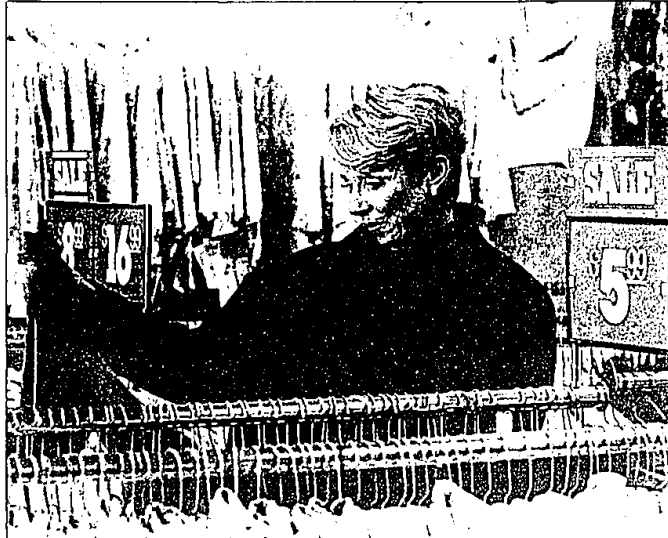
Less-expensive antique clocks, less-expensive music boxes and shell clocks were the bestselling items at the shop this season, he said.

Barbara Melnick, owner of the Melnick Curiosity Shop, said she had not done her books yet but holiday sales

seemed to be going fairly well.

The late Thanksgiving holiday helped at least one Farmington merchant. Jan Kordel, owner of Lifeline Health Foods in the Village Mall, sold fresh organic turkeys for Thanksgiving.

"Our sales were better than expected and a lot of people thought they were so excellent, they ordered them for Christmas," Kordel said.



Judy McGath of Farmington Hills shops at Hit or Miss in the Downtown Farmington Center.

RICK SMITH/staff photographer

Farmington Observer

(USPS 187-840)

Published every Monday and Thursday by Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 35251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Second-class postage paid at Livonia, MI 48151. Address all mail (subscription, change of address, Form 3569) to P.O. Box 2428, Livonia, MI 48151. Telephone 591-0500.

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Arthritis hurts. Why don't doctors prescribe medicine that will stop the pain?

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In the elderly individual with arthritis, addiction is unlikely. Unfortunately if narcotics are used on a regular basis, these medications can cause profound constipation, dizziness, and urinary pain. In turn, difficulty in walking leads to serious falls and head injury or to fractures of the hip or knee.

There are medicines that will alleviate arthritic pain to some extent: tylenol and davenol are examples. However, they cannot provide the relief that codeine or morphine give. As compensation, these alternative pain relievers, even if used on a daily basis, will not cause addiction or increase the risk of falls.

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