

Some merchants disappointed

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for the last-minute Christmas rush, one store owner, Harry Wingter, president of the Farmington Downtown Development Authority, spread his Christmas cheer early.

Wingter, who owns Bon Ton Hallmark shops in Brighton, Livonia and Farmington, said sales have been "phenomenal" this year.

More popular items this year, determined by the number of times each sold out, were shimmering pots (ceramic pots that hold water in a container below a saucer of pot-pourri), jewelry and the ever-popular stuffed animals.

THIS YEAR'S most-sought-after animal was the talking or musical bear, said Marie Laethem, assistant manager at the Bon Ton Shoppe in the Downtown Farmington Center.

The Avanti label, stuffed animals from Italy, sold extremely well, she added, despite the \$40-plus prices.

Wingter, who said his store experienced a "double-digit increase" in sales this year, attributed the store's popularity to the array of merchandise available.

Most merchants agreed that gift shops traditionally do better during the holiday season.

"Small gift-giving versus gifts of clothing usually wins out," said one store manager.

While the sale of clothes may have been on the wane this year, stores such as Radio Shack and Pier 1 Imports in the Downtown Farmington Center noted increases.

This year's most surprising new bestseller, beating out the popularity of computers in years past, were radio-controlled cars, computer software and strangely enough, robots, at Radio Shack.

Robbie, Sr. and Robbie, Jr., \$180 and \$80, respectively, vied for the attention of holiday shoppers and apparently won them over, said store manager Russ Jedlick. Both robots

can be programmed to make turns or wake up the kids in the morning, he added.

PIER 1 Imports manager Jeff Frusabro decided the sudden increase in sales during the past week was due to "shoppers just getting scared" that Christmas was nearing.

Brass, clothes and furniture remained strong sellers this year, along with traditional favorites of wicker baskets and rugs.

Merchants who didn't worry about holiday sales were those who operate record and book stores.

In both cases, sales were up and expected to rise "up to the last minute" as shoppers reached the end of their Christmas lists and opted for the old standbys of books and music.

Managers at both Harmony House stores in Farmington and Farmington Hills agreed that compact discs were best sellers this year, attributed, they said, to so many people receiving disc players last year for Christmas.

Sales were phenomenal, manager Cheri Brunette said, as were the demands for Bruce Springsteen's latest album set.

Book sales at Pages and Pages in Hunters Square were brisk, said owner Grace Gilmore, one of the few merchants in that shopping center not to increase Christmas sales over last year.

"Books are the best buy," she said. "You can get them at the last minute and they suit anybody."

WHILE MOST merchants at Hunters Square in Farmington Hills dimly noted the lack of last-minute shoppers, Leona Weinberg, owner of Leona's, proudly displayed her latest wares from New York for fashion-conscious women.

"I've been in business for 27 years and have my own following," she said.

Designer handbags, gold, silver

and ivory jewelry and "anything glittery" fared well this year, she added.

Another store that witnessed the mad rush of shoppers was newly arrived Metro Gifts at Hunters Square.

Specializing in unique gifts ranging from car-shaped car phones to porcelain masks, Metro Gifts caters to the "untraditional" gift-giver, said manager Brian Holmes.

While most Farmington and Farmington Hills residents prepared for the holidays, merchants at Hunters Square readied themselves for the record low sales this year.

Ed Siegal, owner of Complaisant, a casual sportswear shop, attributed the low sales to lack of customer traffic throughout the complex.

Elaime Weiss, a sales worker at Continental Exclusives, a store specializing in china and crystal imports, agreed that sales were "incredibly slow."

"I don't understand it. This mall has been like a ghost town for most of the merchants," she said.

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