

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

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SHOPPING CENTERED



Linda Ann Chomin

Sales are sweet in candy shops

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
SPECIAL WRITER

Every time I visit Jacobson's candy department at Laurel Park Place in Livonia, the sweet business is bustling...

And a little investigation reveals an ironic twist - in the age when fitness reigns, rising candy sales suggest the need for a truffle or two to soothe psyches after all that strenuous exercise and healthy eating.

"It's a very exciting department here," said department manager Gladys Hines. We're always busy. Our best seller is Godiva, but people also seem to love our Jacobson's brand because of its creamy texture.

Jacobson's candy cases are filled with fine chocolates by Joseph Schmidt, Godiva (\$29 per pound), Long Grove, and the Jacobson's brand which recently got new packaging. Seasonal items like Joseph Schmidt's truffles, molded in the shapes of turkeys and pumpkins, have arrived just in time for the holidays.

According to Hines, customers like treating themselves as well as others to tempting chocolate treats.

"Customers really like to give Joseph Schmidt as hostess gifts. Made with Belgian chocolate and no other oil than cocoa butter, the truffles (\$1.75 each) are hand painted. They are beautiful as well as tasty. Seven times a year, Schmidt comes out with hand painted collector boxes for his goods. He even offers an edible acorn box filled with little chocolates (\$14.50) that's sold at Harrod's in London," she explained.

For personal or corporate giving, Hines suggests "there's no more welcome gift than a box of chocolates and a bottle of wine or champagne."

"People like giving chocolate as gifts. Our gift basket business is year-round. For a real chocolate, our custom chocolate basket (\$150-\$200) would be the answer. We include a little bit of every chocolate we carry," she said.

Hudson's Westland candy department is filled with gift baskets of every size and description along with an array of fancy chocolates including Godiva, Hudson's Gourmet (bulk chocolates), Chocolat Nouveau, Perugina, Bari & Gail, and their signature brand Frango. Candy is definitely big business here. The sales goal for November is \$18,000, for December \$83,500.

"Candy sales for the year are up 13-percent and we only do half the volume of our stores at Oakland Mall and Somerset," said department manager Joanne MacKenzie. "One of our best sellers is our scoop bowl for kids. Hudson's has always had a line of fun candy for children since our Hudson's store opened in downtown in 1981."

Assistant manager Joanne Welch attested to the popularity of the department with adults.

"While shopping, men or women will buy one or two truffles and pop them into the mouth as a stress reliever. That's their treat for the day," she observed.

Tired of giving the same old box of chocolates? MacKenzie suggests Frango's new Michigan Cherry Chocolates (\$15 for 16 ounces) made with Traverse City cherries. Also great little gifts are a ceramic Santabear dish filled with foil-wrapped milk chocolates (\$11.50 for two ounces) and a decorator reindeer tin bearing raspberry and mint twists (\$11.50 for eight ounces).

"Our candy department is in a service that our customers really look for. We sold a lot of Godiva and Frango for Sweetest Day. You see more pre-packaged than years ago because people want ease," said acting store manager Maureen O'Brien.

Pre-packaged candy is all Neiman Marcus sells. Last September the Troy store eliminated the candy department, but it's temporarily being revived for the holidays.

"Holiday candy sales were always successful and this year is not intended to be any less. We'll have everything from Hanukkah items like stars with gold-wrapped chocolate coins to a \$1,200 train filled with chocolates and gifts," said Neiman's gift gallery manager William Garbe.

There are also hand-dipped carob treats (\$8) for the dog!



A better way: Geoff Hockman (left) of the Townsend Hotel and Chuck Viers (right) of Jacobson's, share their new visions for retailing along Main Street in the 21st century.
PHOTOS BY BILL HANSEN

B'ham looks at 'new urbanism'



By JUDITH DONER BERNE
SPECIAL WRITER

The biggest influx of Somerset shoppers is coming from our suburbs to the west. So downtown Birmingham and its Jacobson's anchor store want to intercept them on their way to or from the newly expanded Troy mall.

That is key to the message that both Geoff Hockman, chairman of Birmingham's Principal Shopping District, and Chuck Viers, operational manager of Jacobson's Birmingham store, delivered to the Retail Executive Group Tuesday night at a dinner meeting at Chianti's in Southfield.

"We do our job we have an opportunity to make that shopping trip include Birmingham," Hockman told the 30 people who attended to hear whether Somerset North and Downtown Birmingham are more like oil and water, or milk and honey. "The Somerset situation has not been negative but positive," he insisted.

Birmingham has engaged in a two-fold approach to accomplish this, according to Hockman, who is also president of the Townsend Hotel.

First, four years ago Lansing legislators were persuaded to give them the lawful legs to set up a Principal Shopping District. And over the past months the city has engaged an outside planner to oversee the creation of a master plan.

The Birmingham PSD raises \$450,000 annually through a special assessment on commercial space within its boundaries to cohesively promote its downtown and oversee tenant recruitment - practices which come naturally to a single-lane road mall.

The money, Hockman acknowledges, is "a drop in the bucket" compared with Somerset which, he says, spent over a million dollars just on its opening. And, he added, "I will be the first to tell you that this (the PSD) is not without its controversy" with landlords, retailers and residents all having a say.

Inherent in the up and coming master plan, Hockman suggests, is development of a new urbanism. Its underlying philosophy is "The pedestrian is king." Free two-hour parking was recently instituted to encourage parking in the existing city decks. Changing the street frontage to encourage pedestrian access and expanding city parks are under consideration.

Building more in-town residential housing is also part of the thinking. So is continuing to develop restaurant and entertainment opportunities that transcend the traditional hours of retail. After January, Hockman predicts, you'll have a lot fewer chain stores in Birmingham since several have relocated to Somerset.

To take up that slack, "We're trying to attract retailers who are interested in being in traditional town settings. We have a chance to bring in services and goods that aren't necessarily competitive with Somerset." That could include more art and antique galleries in the city which now number 44.

A frequently asked question at the concierge desk in Somerset, Hockman reports, is: "How do I get to Birmingham?" To that end, both shopping districts are talking about shuttle buses running between them. Viers, who started out selling toys at Jacobson's 40 years ago, echoes Hockman's positive stance on the ability to compete.

"After 46 years in downtown Birmingham, Jacobson's hasn't just survived change and new competition, the store has actually thrived from it," Viers says. "We've weathered many mall openings including Northland, Tel-Twelve and the Oakland Mall expansion."

And, he says, the Birmingham store has not stood still for Somerset North. "It allowed us to accelerate the remodeling plan we had. We've added a lot more bright colors. I don't believe we would have done it this quickly."

And Jacobson's took the cue from Somerset and opened up a concierge desk where, for example, free rain bonnets are available. But Viers says service has always defined Jacobson's.

"The way you compete anywhere you are is with service. Nordstrom reminds us of that," he said.

Although Jacobson's continues its policies of refusing to advertise com-

parative pricing and sales, he acknowledges that they've gone to tying gift certificates to a customer's monthly sales and giving discounts for those opening up new checking accounts.

Viers says his main competition is not the new Hudson's or Nordstrom, but "our Livonia store" which he says is doing great business. He is striving to continue a 47-year tradition of Birmingham as the No. 1 store in the Jacobson's chain.

The audience of metro-Detroit retailers and service providers to the retail industry seemed impressed.

"Birmingham seems to have a pretty decent plan that they've thought through," said Joe Fada, a director of the Retail Executive Group and a retail specialist at the accounting firm of Arthur Andersen.

"The speakers showed clearly that if you understand what your mission is, you can accomplish your goals," added retail analyst Steve Epstein.

The Perfect Gift

Do you remember the best holiday gift you ever received? Was it a pair of ice skates when you were 10? The four-slice toaster the year your fourth child was born? The framed finger painting from your 5-year-old grandson?

The Eccentric Newspapers wish to publish readers' recollections of their very best gifts ever and what made them so, in a special gift guide on Dec. 12, 1996.

Just let down your memories, 150 words or less, and mail them to: Susan DeMaggio, c/o The Birmingham Eccentric, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009.

Be sure to include your name and phone number in case there are questions. Stories selected will be based on the gift's uniqueness and impact on your life. Published stories will win for their author, a special gift from the newspaper.

So... Now do you remember the best holiday gift you ever received?

Deadline for stories is Friday, Nov. 8 at 5 p.m.

News of special events of interest to shoppers is included in this calendar. Send promotion information to: Mall & Mainstreets, c/o Birmingham Eccentric, 805 East Maple, 48009; or fax (810) 644-1314. The deadline is Wednesday at 5 p.m. for publication on Monday.

ELECTION DAY! TUESDAY, NOV. 5

Ski Clinics

Hudson's hosts Professional Ski Instructors of America offering tips and demonstrating techniques noon to 1 p.m. in the Ski Zone. On Nov. 7 at Oakland 7-8 p.m. On Nov. 8 at Somerset noon to 1 p.m. Register to win prizes. Lakeside, Hall/Schoenherr, Sterling Heights. (810) 666-2800.

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 6

Golf Show

Several exhibitors offer clearance golf and related merchandise throughout the mall during regular hours until Nov. 10. Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt. Livonia. (810) 476-1160.

THURSDAY, NOV. 7

Holiday exhibit benefit

Families are invited to preview Hudson's annual holiday walk-through exhibit of "Wind in the Willows." Refreshments and entertainment, 6-8 p.m. at Hudson's to benefit Big Brothers/Big Sisters. \$25 for one adult/two children. The exhibit with 23 vignettes, many animated, opens to the public and special groups from Nov. 10-Dec. 31 at no charge during mall hours. Summit Place Mall, Elizabeth Lake/Telegraph. Waterford. (810) 669-0600.

FRIDAY, NOV. 8

Mall hosts Radiothon

To benefit Variety, The Children's Charity, a 34-hour broadcast from the mall's Center Court can be heard on Star 97.1 WYST-FM through Nov. 9. The event includes celebrity guest spots,

ADDED ATTRACTIONS



Wind in the Willows

a worldwide Web-A-Thon, on-air auction of autographed sports/entertainment items, and interviews with the special children of Variety. Every pledge of \$197 will insure the purchase and delivery of a new bike to a disadvantaged child in the Detroit Police Department. Oakland Mall, 14 Mile/John R. Troy. (810) 258-5511.

Trunk Show

Redwood & Ross hosts Corbin's Collection for Women from 5-8 p.m. Repeated Nov. 9 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Representative Burt Bowen takes special fabric/style orders. 241 Merrill, Birmingham. (810) 644-7520.

Artist Event

MacKenzie-Childs representative demonstrates pottery painting techniques 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Repeated Nov. 9 at LaBelle Provence. Maple/Bates, Birmingham. 1-800-655-9953.

Artist Visits

Meet modular jewelry artist Lynn Strong of South Carolina from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and again on Nov. 9 at Sandra Collins Gallery. The retail

art gallery features contemporary works in clay, fiber, metal and wood. 470 North Woodward, Birmingham. (810) 642-4795.

SATURDAY, NOV. 9

Fashion editor visits

Hear CNN Fashion correspondent Elsa Klenzsch 8 a.m. Last in Nordstrom's Lifestyle Series. Tickets \$10 per person. Fashion show follows. Somerset Collection North. Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy. (810) 815-5100, ext. 1890.

Furniture Seminar

Local designer M. Fillmore Harty, graduate of the Pratt Institute, discusses "the right furniture choice" 1 p.m. at Gorman's. Reservations requested for the free program. 12 Mile/Telegraph, Southfield. (810) 353-9880.

Fashion Show

Marleen Saponic of Feminine Productions presents a fashion show of winter and holiday clothing designs from the mall stores at 1 and 3 p.m. Guests can register to win gifts and certificates from mall merchandise. Must be present to win. Presentation near Jonathan B. Pub, Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt. (810) 476-1160.

Gift Shopping Benefit

26th annual Giftorama 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Repeated Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission \$5, free parking and shuttle service to Cranbrook Kingswood Campus. Proceeds benefit alumnae council activities and campus renovation projects.

Shop at booths stocked by Michigan's premier gift boutiques and unique artisans including: Silks by Min Wang of Troy, Nopal of Farmington Hills, Hannan of Birmingham, Sharon & Associates of West Bloomfield, Ten & Crumpets Designs of West Bloomfield and A Wreath of Wishes of Dearborn, plus many more. Lone Pine/Woodward, Birmingham. (810) 645-3555.



Goody basket: Hudson's enjoys brisk sales from the confections in its jazzed up Marketplace departments.