

Holiday shoppers making merchants merry

BY VIVIAN DEGAIR
STAFF WRITER

Suburban merchants are catching the jolly-holly attitude.

Sales are ringing in at better-than-expected levels for the first few days of the holiday shopping season. Consumer forecasters attribute the rush to the relatively late Thanksgiving, creating five fewer shopping days, record low Michi-

gan unemployment, and a positive outlook for next year's economy.

But local malls are doing their part to attract shoppers with nongame, eye-catching displays and celebrations that acknowledge the area's cultural and ethnic diversity.

Southfield shoppers at Tel-Twelve Mall and Northland are already filling the parking lots as they enjoy family

programs, valet parking and a myriad of gift ideas for a festive holiday.

At Tel-Twelve Mall, marketing director Jennifer Fox said merchants are welcoming an optimistic crowd.

"We're definitely seeing high volumes of traffic, and we're seeing lots of shopping bags, which means that people are buying, not just browsing. It's a little early, but merchants report stronger

sales than for this same period last year," Fox said.

Visitors to the mall include area school groups, invited to see the "Holidays Around the World," a multicultural holiday display featuring 47 animated figures. Wearing traditional costumes from seven continents, the figures represent holiday activities in Africa, Australia, Antarctica, Asia,

Europe, Mexico, North America and South America. In Australia, for instance Fox said, Christmas is celebrated in summer with special soccer games and a carnival.

Tel-Twelve will host an "Old Fashioned Christmas" on Dec. 7, with complimentary hot cocoa, cookies and a sing-along. On Dec. 14, the mall presents, "A Kwanza Celebration."

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