

Last minute helpers

7-Elevens keep Santa hours

On Christmas Day in America, the wheels of commerce come to a grinding halt. Everywhere, that is, but the neighborhood 7-Eleven.

The company offered the following account of their holiday operations.

More than 95 percent of the 5,100 U.S. 7-Eleven stores are open at least part of Christmas Day — the biggest sales day of the year for the convenience store chain.

So what is it like to work in a 7-Eleven store on Christmas Day? Do customers have that special holiday cheer, and what do they buy?

One manager of a store in Virginia said the day goes by fast because the store is crowded and the customers are in such good spirits. Store employees bring in cookies and Christmas candies to share with each other and with customers. They play Christmas music and decorate the store according to a manager in Dallas.

"People count on 7-Eleven being open," said the company's human resources manager John Clague. "They need us for their bacon and eggs for Christmas breakfast, for the batteries that Santa forgot, for gasoline to get to Grandma's house, for film to take pictures once they get there and for the hundreds of other holiday essentials we carry."

The stores ask for volunteers to work Christmas and often share store crews.

"Our biggest sellers on Christmas Day are batteries, film and last-minute ingredients for their holiday dinner," said John Donovan, category manager for seasonal merchandise. "We stock up on dinner rolls, eggnog, stick butter, canned yams, milk, eggs, whipping cream and all the last-minute food items that you always seem to need a little more of."

And, Donovan added, the last-minute gift-buying continues through Christmas Day.

The last few years we've really focused on carrying gifts that people won't be embarrassed to

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give their grandmother, kids, nieces or nephews." Though the stores can't accommodate a giant selection, they do carry some of the hottest gifts of the season, such as Hot Wheels cars, miniature Etch-A-Sketches, Nickleodeon watches and computer games.

One thing is certain. Working on Christmas isn't like any other work day of the year.

"There are no Scrooges on Christmas Day," says Detroit 7-Eleven franchisee David Krolkowski. "Everyone who comes into the store is so friendly and so appreciative that we are open."

In all, fewer than 300 of 7-Eleven's 5,100 American stores are expected to close on Christmas Day.

Here are a few fun facts about holiday sales at 7-Eleven:

- Cotton ball sales jump 25 percent in December. The company speculates there are a lot of last minute Santa art projects.

- Film sales rise 75 percent the week on Christmas, most of which are on Christmas Day.

- Battery sales rise 68 percent during the same period.

- 7-Eleven sold enough eggnog last December for 4.5 million people to sip while roasting chestnuts on an open fire.

- Two of the most popular stocking stuffers at 7-Eleven are lottery tickets and 7-Eleven prepaid, long-distance phone cards.

- Sales of Roloids, Alka-Seltzer and Tums jump 30 percent in December.

- Sales of dinner rolls rise nine times the week before Christmas and a remarkable 65 times on Christmas Day.

- Whipping cream, sour cream

and butter sales double Christmas week.

- Broad sales increase 350 percent on Christmas Day.

- Sales of fire logs and bundled firewood light up at the holidays.

- December is the biggest month for sales of prepaid, long-distance phone cards. The cards are popular as gifts for college students, relatives and friends. (7-Eleven is the nation's largest retailer of phone cards. Since 1995, 7-Eleven has sold enough minutes of long-distance time for one person to talk non-stop for 476 years — that's enough for one college student to talk straight into the year 2,472.)

- Snacks food such as chips, dips, canned peanuts, crackers and sodas soar at the holidays, especially the larger sizes. December is also a big month for 7-Eleven nachos, especially in Colorado and Texas.

- 7-Eleven has ordered 28,000 of its 1996 Limited Edition Toy Race Car Carriers — the second limited edition release in its holiday collectors series. It features a toy tractor trailer with working headlights and horn and a removable race car. Each truck is numbered. Some stores have been taking orders for the trucks since November.

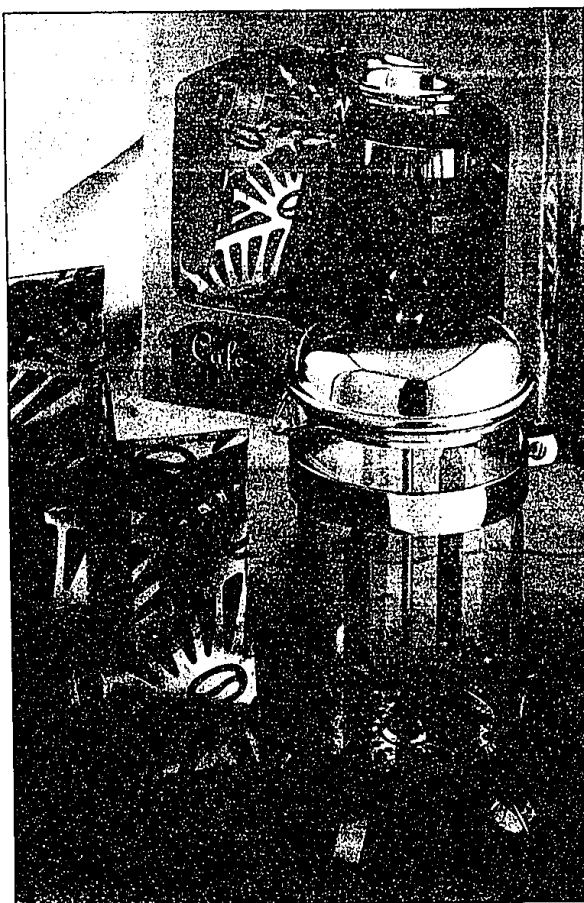
- Beer and wine sales shift to premium brands, and champagne sales increase.

- December and January are the biggest months for sales of sun block, lip protector and sunglasses at 7-Eleven stores in Incline Village, Nevada. The store is surrounded by ski resorts.

- Hot dog, nacho and donut sales decline the first two weeks of January at 7-Eleven, only to mysteriously rise back to normal rates the third week of January. (Pastry sales are down 11 percent the first week of January; 3.5 percent the second week, and back to normal by the third week.)

- Yogurt and skim milk sales rise 15 percent in January and February — the highest sales months of the year for those two items.

Coffee breaks



Holiday blends: The Coffee Beanery shops in most malls around town, have special coffee flavors for the holidays available in gift packages with special-designed foils. The shops also carry brew machines and serving accessories.

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