

## Good retail service may await you, too

SHOP TALK



NICOLE STAFFORD

Service stinks, and everything you buy these days falls apart — I can't tell you the number of times I've heard that complaint or voiced it. Widespread consumer dissatisfaction doesn't surprise me. We've all waited too long in line to spend our money, purchased appliances that blow up after a year of use and down-right useless salespeople.

We believe manufacturers and retailers are only interested in making an extra buck, which can involve cutting corners in quality and good service.

My own consumer cynicism disallows me from not only shopping in general but also making essential retail purchases.

At the moment, for instance, I'm in a need of a couch.

For several months I've been searching, all the while without a cozy place to curl up on when watching a good flick or Thursday night "must-see-TV."

I'm afraid of disappointment, convinced the couch of my dreams will fray at the seams upon delivery.

The day after the couch's warranty expires the frame will plunge to the floor, I think, increasing my purchase anxiety and tendency to procrastinate.

So when the shoulder strap of my leather Coach handbag broke, I was not surprised.

"Oh well, it has to break," I thought to myself. "Planned obsolescence." All companies design their products with a target date for destruction in mind.

Actually, I had been toting around my little black Coach bag almost every day for several years. In the end, I decided it had served me well, far better than any other purse I had owned, and for a longer period of time than most retail products.

In fact, I would say its longevity exceeded my expectations. Not only that, I could still use the purse since it was equipped with a carrying handle.

Not inclined to run out and spend money on a replacement, I continued to carry — by hand — the trusty Coach bag, never even considering I might be able to replace the shoulder strap.

Several weeks later, I found myself — accompanied by Mom — wandering into the Coach leather store at The Somerset Collection in Troy, debating whether to inquire about the availability of a strap replacement.

"It looks like that purse, but bigger," I told Mom, hoping she would spot the model that matched my purse, which was I carrying at the time.

But before either of us had an opportunity to peruse the display shelves, we were distracted by a soothing voice at our backs.

"You need a shoulder strap?" inquired the voice's owner, as if reading my mind. (Actually, the voice's owner, the store's assistant manager, had been observantly and patiently listening to Mom and I discuss my dilemma.)

"Do you have the broken one?" the woman inquired in a matter-of-fact tone, as Mom and I turned our attention from handbag display to attentive store manager.

"No, I don't," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"Hold on, I'll get you a replacement," she said and then disappeared somewhere in the back of the store. I looked at Mom, confused but pleased.

Moments later, the manager returned carrying a new leather strap, its brass clasps and adjustment buckle shiny as gold.

"Just drop off the broken strap next time you're at the mall," she said.

"Do you always do this?" I inquired. "Coach replaces all its hardware free of charge," she said. "Would you like me to clean your purse?"

Imagine my astonishment. Not only had the usefulness of my Coach bag been restored but its nicks — and dirty, as Mom pointed out — leather exterior was about to be rejuvenated.

Of course, the service did not come without a pitch; Coach sells its own line of leather cleaning and conditioning products.

So what, I thought. My needs as a customer — a non-buying customer, for that matter — had been met, and my expectations had been surpassed yet again.

## The joy of shopping

### Local Girl Scouts literally shopped 'till they dropped

BY NICOLE STAFFORD

SPECIAL EDITOR

Girl Scouts Courtney Smith and Jessica McClain revel for hours in the purchase of a \$12 cassette tape by the band "FIVE," their glowing cheeks evidence of the joy of shopping in its purest, most innocent form.

"It's more fun than shopping with your mom," says 8-year-old Courtney of making the mall circuit with girl friends and, most importantly, best friend Jessica.

"Yeah," adds Jessica. "And, (Courtney) always shows me things. ... We got to see more things that way. I wouldn't have seen the FIVE CD, if Courtney hadn't found it."

Members of Girl Scout Troop 3296, the Westland adolescents are two of more than 2,000 Girl Scouts turning out April 17 for an all-night shopping, eating, talking and movie-watching extravaganza.

Held annually at Wonderland Mall in Livonia, the event, dubbed "Slumberland at Wonderland," epitomizes the mall-shopping experience.

Pit stops for Burger King french fries and school girl gossip follow spurts of frenzied store browsing. Other moments, travel time between stores, for instance, are reserved for purchase-making plans.

While movies and other activities are available for the hordes of Girl

Scouts roaming and sitting about the mall, they uniformly exclaim the primary reason for coming is: "SHOPPING!"

Surprisingly, impulse purchases are the exception rather than the rule. These young girls, who ranged in age from 7 to 16, are savvy shoppers with discerning tastes and an eye for bargains.

As Jessica puts it, "We like to think things over. ... And we don't like the musical group 'Hanson.' They sing too loud and look like girls."

True, Courtney's music purchase at F.Y.E. (For Your Entertainment) is well reasoned and sensible; the cassette was on sale, and Courtney loves

music and adores FIVE. More importantly, FIVE is one of a handful of bands she and her peers currently idolize. And Courtney and friends have, essentially, made the purchase communally.

A quintessential shopping experience for adolescents, deciding with the help and shared enthusiasm of your friends to make a purchase, let's face it, doesn't happen often in adulthood.

Courtney's small, yet triumphant purchase also illustrates how shopping makes people feel empowered, if only momentarily.

And, \$12.19 worth of empowerment is better than none at all.

Courtney's shopping experience might even be likened to the emotional state of a woman who defiantly purchases that \$2,000 designer suit she's been wanting since last season.

The elation is the same, even though the price tags are radically different.

In fact, not much shopping required before members of Troop 3296 are ready to return to the night home base, a row of sleeping bags carefully unfolded in front of a closed store, to celebrate and talk about their purchases.

Brooke Killeen, 7, also has made a sought-after music purchase at F.Y.E., a cassette tape by the group "In Sync" for \$10.69, which the girls pass around and admire.

Likewise, 8-year-old Macie Bowman withdraws an In Sync pencil and book from her shopping bag, igniting excitement among the other members of Troop 3296.

After the girls review their purchases, plan their next shopping experience and count the dollar bills left to spend, they're off to Stroh's Ice-cream for another pit stop. Not surprisingly, their choices are the same — half the group orders "big gulp" Mountain Dew sodas, the rest settle on Superman ice cream cones.

Is anybody getting tired? "NO," the girls exclaim in unison. What's next? "SHOPPING!"



Pit stop: Kyrie Bowman and Katy Douly indulge.



Savvy shopper: Jessica McClain from Westland listens to a new album before deciding to make a purchase. She is one of more than 2,000 girl scouts who turned out for a late-night shopping event at Wonderland Mall in Livonia.



Home base: Macie Bowman and Kayla Yuchasz take cat naps before more shopping.

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

### SUNDAY, APRIL 25

**COLLECTOR TOY SHOW**  
The Winross Collectors Club of America sponsors a toy collector's show at the Monaghan K of C Hall in Livonia, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. For information, please call (734) 747-7192.

### TUESDAY, APRIL 27

**CHANEL DAY**  
Saks Fifth Avenue, Somerset Collection in Troy, presents "High Summer 1999," a Chanel collection focus day, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Designer Salon.

### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28

**VIEWRAGAMO FOR FALL**  
New Ferragamo's women's special order footwear collection for fall at Saks Fifth Avenue, The Somerset Collection in Troy, through May 1, Women's

## ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Designer Shoe Salon, first floor.

### CLARKS ENGLAND SHOES

View the shoe collection of Clarks England at Jacobson's in downtown Birmingham, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Women's Shoe Salon. Show also runs 10 a.m.-3 p.m. April 30 at Jacobson's at Laurel Park Place in Livonia.

### THURSDAY, APRIL 29

### WOMEN'S SHOW

Fashion, food, fitness, education, business, travel and the home are the subjects of a four-day show (through May 2) for women at the Novi Expo Center in Novi. Discounted admission coupons are available at local Art Van Furniture stores. For further information, call (800) 949-0248.

**WARDROBE SEMINAR**  
Jones New York holds a series of wardrobe seminars at local Hudson's stores through May 1, Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, 7 p.m. April 29, The Somerset Collection in Troy, 1 p.m. March 30 and Oakland

Mall in Troy, 2 p.m. May 1, Jones New York department.

### SATURDAY, MAY 1

**DANCE THE MARIACHI**  
Wonderland Mall in Livonia presents "Uno de Mayo," a dine and dance family night with live mariachi music, 6-9 p.m.

### BRIDAL JEWELRY SHOW

The Gold Loft, 33101 Grand River in Farmington Hills, holds a trunk show of wedding bands and engagement rings, 12-4:30 p.m. For information, please call (248) 478-0400.

### SUNDAY, MAY 2

### IN-HOME TRUNK SHOW

View the Doncaster summer collection through May 7 at area homes in Plymouth, Canton and Northville. For information about this traveling trunk show, please call, (734) 416-8838.

### BEANIE BABY SHOW

Michigan's largest Beanie Baby show with more than 50 vendors returns to the Plymouth Cultural Center at 625 Farmer Street in Plymouth, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Admission is \$5. Kids, age 4-12, enter for \$2.