

There's more to the American dream than the good life



NICOLE STAFFORD

Early in the week, I backed into and damaged my parent's car. A deep juvenile guilt sat with me all day. But when I went to bed that night, I felt less guilty than I would have before Sept. 11, the day terrorists attacked the United States.

Like Americans across the country, the tragedy has brought life's important things into focus and drawn the rest of it into the shadows for my parents and me. While dad initially expressed frustration about the accident, he quickly embraced my apology — with compassion.

In the afternoon, mom made a point of calling me at the office to say not to worry, the scratch wasn't that bad, and "it's just a car."

That phrase, "it's just," I think, captures Americans' current feelings about many aspects of our culture, with material possessions and the lifestyle afforded by our society ranking high on the list.

The terrorist attacks have awakened Americans from a deep sleep, commentators, writers and academics are saying.

On the surface, that image says Americans have been living in a dream world that suppressed the threat of terrorism and perpetuated the delusion of Americans' untouchability.

But look a little closer, take the concept one step farther. Have our haubles and preoccupation with "the good life" been aiding our deep sleep?

There's no doubt Americans are extraordinarily materialistic compared to the rest of the world. Rampant consumerism is a phrase used to characterize our culture, not just our economy.

It's also fair to say consumer goods and services demand our time and attention, whether we like it or not.

And we, like all other human beings, are products of environment. On a more basic level, we are human beings driven to secure the best existence we can for ourselves and family members.

I am not suggesting Americans stop buying things. Yes, at the moment, shopping is an act of patriotism. Our slowing economy, further damaged by the terrorist attacks, desperately needs consumers to pump in dollars.

Likewise, I'm not proposing Americans banish the lifestyle a capitalist democracy affords.

The problem isn't that we make, market, sell, buy and own lots of stuff in America. The problem is we lose perspective. We get caught up in all the stuff. And before we know it, our lives are overflowing with dreams of trendy wardrobes, shiny sports cars, a best-new-computer-money-can-buy, a professionally equipped kitchen, a bigger house ... The list goes on and on.

The irony is that our consumerism works to undermine the capitalist democracy that makes our marvelous way of life possible.

It keeps us so busy, distracted and hungry for more we have neither the time nor energy nor inclination, to work at being informed, active citizens of the United States.

Our focus on goods and services insulates us, too. It not only removes us from the reality of day-to-day living in other parts of the world but also perpetuates our sense of untouchability and boundless freedom.

Last year, 47 percent of all terrorist incidents worldwide were committed against U.S. citizens and property, according to the U.S. Department of State. Our own freedom was at stake. We were too busy worrying about how the decline of "dotcom" stocks would affect our discretionary income to see it.

Doesn't the country's recent obsession with emotional well-being and items like candles, aromatherapy, self-help books and herbal supplements seem a bit absurd in light of our innocence about terrorism?

The same could be said of the "style" movement. How much time do Americans spend flipping through the pages of magazines like *In Style* and *Martha Stewart Living*? Do they devote even an equal amount of time to reading publications like *U.S. News & World Report*?

Then, there's the technology craze. Do those of us who own a Palm Pilot, cell phone or laptop computer, use the time saved by these devices to read up on global happenings and foreign policy?

Wake up Americans, we can live the American Dream but we also have to protect it.

## Signs of hope

Local retail community offers its support, mobilizes for times ahead

By NICOLE STAFFORD  
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Storefront windows, mall entrances and downtown streets look and feel different now.

Dozens of American flags blow in the breeze in front of shops and restaurants in downtown Birmingham.

In Plymouth, storefronts wear banners, ribbons and flags. Discs bearing painted American flags hang from posts in downtown Rochester.

At Saks Fifth Avenue in Troy, elegant tributes to the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attack have replaced mannequins in the store's window displays. Inside the Somerset Collection, signs beside concierge desks bear a message: "We honor the memory of those lost in the nation's tragedy and our thoughts and prayers are with their families."

At Laurel Park Place students pass out red-white-and-blue ribbons and collect donations. Meanwhile, administrators at the Livonia mall plan programs to raise money and collect blood for the American Red Cross in October.

But something else has changed inside malls and on downtown streets: shoppers are sparse.

"Traffic is way down compared to before the 11th," said Robert L. Benkert, owner of The Claymore Shop in downtown Birmingham. "We've got to get people back."

While the local retail community uses its resources to help victims of the tragedy and raise shoppers' spirits, they're also having to cope with a lack of business.

Bradley Jernigan, marketing director at Summit Place said traffic seemed normal at the Waterford mall but described the atmosphere as far from conducive to shopping. "Obviously with what has happened, people are more focused on the victims and the families of the victims."

Julie Nemeth, marketing director at Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills said opportunities for retailers to aid victims of the tragedy abound. "The difficulty is finding ones that bring in business, too. We want anything we do to have a meaning and value for everyone involved."



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBOWITZ

Paying tribute: The storefront window displays at Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, honor the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. White lilies on glass pedestals sit before an American flag inside the window, which reads "With Sadness."

## Birmingham clothing retailers maintain optimism following cancelation of annual Fall Spectacular

By NICOLE STAFFORD  
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The Birmingham Fall Spectacular, a benefit for the Beaumont Pediatric Cancer Survivor Scholarship Fund, would have been a real boost for merchants in the downtown district.

The Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber decided Monday to cancel the annual fall fashion event.

Originally slated for Sept. 12, it was postponed last week out of respect for the national tragedy. "It certainly was disappointing," said Chris Gorton, director of public relations and special events for Jacobson's, a merchant slated to participate in the Fall Spectacular fashion show.

Retail, style and special store events are listed in this calendar. Please send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. By fax, (248) 644-1314. E-mail, nstafford@oe.hometown.com. Deadline for publication is two weeks in advance.

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

#### ART IN THE PARK

Downtown Birmingham's Shain Park hosts the 27th Annual Art in the Park event featuring more than 170 artists in a juried art fair, plus food, musical entertainment and children's art area, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission to the event, which benefits the Common Ground Sanctuary, is free. For details, call (248) 456-8150 or visit [www.CommonGroundSanctuary.org](http://www.CommonGroundSanctuary.org) on the Internet.

#### AMAZING MAZES

Okland Mall in Troy presents Amazing Mazes & Puzzling Puzzles, an interactive exhibit featuring larger-than-life mazes, puzzles and mind benders for children and adults, through Oct. 14 in Center Court. Exhibit hours are 3-8 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. For more details, call (248) 597-2200.

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

#### ARTS & CRAFTS SHOW

Westland Shopping Center hosts a "made in America" arts and crafts show, during regular mall hours through Sept. 30. Event includes artisan demonstrations. For additional information, call (734) 425-5001.

"But, I think it was the right thing to do."

With the country's slowing economy further shaken in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, participating retailers are understandably disappointed they've lost an opportunity to promote new merchandise and jump-start the fall shopping season.

"It is such a hype for downtown Birmingham," said Karen Daskas, co-owner of Tender, a women's clothing boutique featured in the Fall Spectacular runway show. "Is that going to be missed, yes, of course," said Daskas. "But, it's understandable. ... You know it's an unfortunate situation for everyone involved, but it's very small, given what's happened in the world."

## ADDED ATTRACTIONS

### FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

#### PENDLETON FOCUS DAYS

Jacobson's stores present Pendleton's clothing for fall through Sept. 29, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Classic Sportswear department. On Friday at the Livonia store in Laurel Park Place, call (734) 591-7696, and on Saturday at the Rochester Hills store, call (248) 651-6000.

#### MEN'S POLO COLLECTION

Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, hosts men's fall 2001 Polo Ralph Lauren collection with a designer representative, through Sept. 29, 4-8 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Saturday, first floor. For details, call (248) 643-9000.

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

#### CELEBRATE EDUCATION DAY

Parisian at Laurel Park Place in Livonia raises money for community schools, while shoppers enjoy a 20 percent discount. Shoppers only need to purchase a ticket from a participating school to participate in the event, which includes refreshments, door prizes and a drawing for a \$500 shopping spree. Tickets are \$5 each. For a list of participating schools or to purchase a ticket, call (734) 953-7500.

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

#### FALL FASHION SHOW

Tender of Birmingham and Koochie Koo of West Bloomfield present the Generations Fashion Show

Patricia Spadefore, co-owner of Imelda's Closet, feels much the same. "Everybody understands, and it's a shame that we can't raise money for the scholarship fund."

And despite growing concern over consumer confidence, Birmingham's clothing merchants continue to be optimistic. "I feel the merchants know that we are up against a challenging season," said Daskas. "But everybody is in a decent mood."

Ticket refunds are available. However, the Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber would be grateful to purchasers who donate the money towards helping to defray the cost of event planning and pre-production. Call (248) 644-1700.

II at Israel Bonds at 50, a family event with dinner (Metro Detroit's Women's Division of State of Israel Bonds 50th anniversary), 5 p.m., Congregation Shaarey Zedek, 29201 Telegraph Road in Southfield. Tickets are \$10 for children and \$36 for adults. Children under age 3 are free. For information or to purchase tickets, call (248) 352-6555.

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 1

#### EILEEN FISHER EVENT

Lynn Portnoy Women's Clothier, 29260 Franklin Road in Southfield, hosts its annual tax-free Eileen Fisher shopping week (store pays sales tax on purchases), through Oct. 6. Store hours are 10:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday and Friday, 10:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Saturday. For information, call (248) 353-2900.

#### PERSONAL BEST SEMINAR

Birmingham stylist Jonco leads a seminar about achieving one's best look based on principles of face structure, body shape, skin tone, lifestyle and profession, 7-9 p.m., Farrell Reis Salon, 644 North Old Woodward in Birmingham. One attendee will receive a complete makeover by Jonco. Event includes free mini-manicures, scalp treatments and other beauty services. Registration is required to attend. Call (248) 433-0885.

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5

#### JEWELRY DESIGNER VISITS

Jules R. Schubot Jewellers, 3001 West Big Beaver in Troy, hosts an appearance by jewelry designer Michael Bondanza and a showing of the new Piguet Polo watch, 3-8 p.m. Guests are invited to enjoy a champagne reception and view Bondanza's jewelry designs. Call (248) 649-1122 or (800) SCHUBOT.