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Beat Rush By Going Local

Locally Owned Shops Bank On Less Stress, Good Service

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Local retailers throughout the Madison area will kick off the traditional start of the holiday shopping season today by offering something the big retailers and shopping malls often can't -- smaller crowds, less stress and better service.

Peg Scholtes, owner of Capitol Kids at 8 Carroll St., said although several items in her shop will be on sale, for the most part, it's business as usual.

"We hope to attract thoughtful gift buyers to the store and not people who are part of a feeding frenzy," Scholtes said.

Because many people are off from work, the Friday after Thanksgiving is one of the biggest shopping days of the year, resulting in long lines, harried salespeople and frayed nerves. Madison-based merchants hope to give their customers an alternative to that manic pace.

John Hutchinson, co-owner of Fontana Sports, an outdoor sporting goods store at 251 State St. and 7948 Tree Lane Drive, said he will try to offer his customers service they might not get in a store crowded with shoppers scrambling for bargains.

"You don't get the congestion that you get in the malls, so it's easier to get help," Hutchinson said. "It's easier to find the product you're looking for."

But national retailers and malls are doing their best to entice customers to brave the crowds and even arrive early. Julie Cabbage, the marketing director of the East Towne Mall, said the first 500 shoppers through the doors this morning at 7 a.m. were to receive gift cards worth as much as \$20.

"It's just our way of saying thanks for shopping with us," Cabbage said. "You're shopping for everyone on your list, so it's nice to get something for yourself."

Best Buy, a consumer electronics retailer at 7357 West Towne Way, planned to open at 5 a.m. today. Sherie Mitchell, a store manager, said customers who line up by the door in the pre-dawn hours can enjoy big savings. "It's worth the wait," Mitchell said.

But Sue Berg, marketing director for the law firm of DeWitt, Ross & Stevens, doesn't think so. "It's too much of a challenge. It's the crowds. And the bargains they offer just aren't big enough," Berg said. "I'm not a morning person. And it's just not worth it to me to get up that early to save a little money for all that aggravation."

Merchants like Hutchinson say rather than trying to beat major retailers at the game of lowering prices, they can compete more effectively with service and giving their customers more of their attention.

"With all the money they can throw at marketing and low prices, it's crazy to compete. We don't even try," Hutchinson said. "But we can do a better job of giving shoppers the help they need."

Gerri DiMaggio-Pesselman, owner of DiMaggio's Euro Designs, a furniture and home accessories store at 7475 Mineral Point Road, said she'll provide cookies and beverages so her customers can enjoy their shopping experience. "I think that's the beauty of a local business, taking time to focus on the personable things," DiMaggio-Pesselman said.

Cindi Krause, of Madison, a mother of two with one on the way, says she plans to do plenty of shopping in the coming weeks. But today she will restrict purchases to smaller businesses with less traffic.

"It's tradition for us to get the tree after Thanksgiving," Krause said. "And we'll probably get some lights, but we're not going to



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battle the big, bad mall."

A recent Gallup poll reports that American consumers will spend on average \$763 on gifts this holiday season. That's up from \$730 a year ago, despite high gas prices and home heating costs.

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