

Merchants readying for Black Friday

More stores could boost draw on Kentucky 54

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South Frederica Street will have some competition this year for the Black Friday shopping dollars.

For years, the area that grew up around Towne Square Mall has been the main attraction for shoppers on the day after Thanksgiving.

But the recent addition of Wal-Mart and Kohl's is expected to put the Kentucky 54 area into the mix big-time this year.

Black Friday "was very good for us last year," Jim Wheatley, manager of the Kentucky 54 Wal-Mart Supercenter, said Monday. "I was very happy. But it'll probably be much bigger this year with Kohl's out here."

Wheatley said his doorbuster specials include a 42-inch plasma TV for less than \$1,000.

Doors will open at 5 a.m. Friday at both Wal-Mart and Kohl's.

"We're open 24 hours a day," Wheatley said. "People can come in out of the cold and shop for other items. We just can't start selling the specials until 5 a.m."

Kevin Downes, Kohl's manager, was out of town Monday.

But a store spokeswoman said, "We'll have a lot of specials Friday."

Crowds headed for retail stores nearby make restaurants happy.

This will be the first Black Friday for several of the Kentucky 54 restaurants including Bob Evans, which has a choice spot in front of Wal-Mart.

"We'll open for breakfast at 6 a.m., our regular time," said Kim Rogers. "We definitely hope it's a big day. We had a big crowd Sunday and on Election Day."

Ole South Barbecue, one of the oldest restaurants along Kentucky 54, is expecting a busier day Friday.

"We'll open at 6 a.m.," said Karen Husk. "We're usually busy that day (Black Friday) anyway. But I think it'll be a lot better this year with Kohl's out here."

Beef 'O' Brady's is among the restaurants preparing for their first Black Friday.

"We're opening at 11 a.m. for lunch as usual," said Stacy Bratcher, one of the owners. "We're hoping for a big crowd. We have a \$5.99 lunch menu from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. with soups, sandwiches and platters."

Also new this year on Kentucky 54 are Montana's Mike's, Super Buffet, McDonald's, Arby's and Ritzy's.

Black Friday is considered the official start of the Christmas season, although the International Council of Shopping Centers estimates that 45 percent of Americans have already started shopping for the nation's biggest holiday.

The day after Thanksgiving is typically the busiest shopping day of the year -- in terms of people in stores.

Some studies have estimated that more than 70 percent of Americans will visit a retail store this weekend.

But the highest sales volume is typically on the Saturday before Christmas.

There are two theories about the origin of Black Friday.

Some say it refers to the date when retailers used to see their first profits of the year, moving their balance sheet from the red to black.

Others say it refers to the stress of so many people battling for bargains on the same day.

The Web site www.WordSpy.com says the earliest print reference to the term was in the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times on Nov. 27, 1986.

That story says the date is "known as Black Friday for the legendary hordes" of shoppers.

But www.Answers.com traces the expression back to the New York Times on Dec. 3, 1922.

That article supports the accounting theory.

Whatever the origin, Black Friday today has become the Super Bowl, World Series and Olympics of shopping.

Last year, the National Retail Federation said the three-day Black Friday weekend saw the average shopper spending \$302.81 -- for a national sales total of \$27.8 billion for the weekend.

The International Council of Shopping Centers says its research shows that the average household will spend \$676 on Christmas shopping this year, up from \$620 last year.