

Christmas rush gets off to hectic start over weekend

(AP) — Retailers say they expect a strong Christmas shopping season after a good post-Thanksgiving start.

Shoppers crowded stores around Oregon Friday.

"Business is pretty darn good, the store is real crowded," said Sandy Perry, manager of the downtown Nordstrom department store in Portland. "We are busier than last year."

"I can tell you, we're having a great day," said Perry, whose store recently completed an \$18

million remodeling project.

"It's a little early to tell what people are buying this Christmas season, but we can kind of feel some tendencies," she said. "Leather is very important and of course leather is a high price item."

Nordstrom has an "At Your Service" desk offering "restaurant menus, hotel reservations, cabs, diapers, strollers, and even umbrellas."

In Albany, G.I. Joe's department store manager Cam Smith

was delighted to see the morning's rain.

"Rain makes people want to shop," Smith said.

Mid-Willamette Valley shoppers looking for bargains took advantage of sales on one of the busiest shopping days of the year.

"We're shopping today because we're insane," said Dorothy Claxton of Lebanon, who was at the Albany Target department store with two daughters and a granddaughter. "It's

girls' day out, and we're going to stay here until noon."

Target clerk Sandy Easom of Albany was grateful that most early-morning shoppers had read the ads and knew what they were looking for.

"They know what they want and have been pretty much self-serving," she said.

Carol Brockhouse passed out 120 cups of coffee in 45 minutes at the entrance of the Target store.

In Lebanon, shoppers at Pay

Less Drug Store were buying watches and Christmas wrapping paper, said Denny Horton, the store manager.

"I can't believe how much wrap they are buying," she said.

About 150 people were waiting at the doors to Pay Less before the store opened at 7 a.m., she said.

Stores also drew crowds in Coos Bay on the Oregon Coast.

"It's going to be a good day," said Fred Meyer Store Director Bob Addy, "and hopefully it's an indication of a good strong season."

"The Christmas wrap and decorations are flying out of here," Addy said. "We've sold out of our first shipment already."

Sales and law-aways were running ahead of last year, he said, "and that's always a good indicator."

Despite the early hour, shoppers were waiting outside K Mart in Coos Bay 20 minutes ahead of opening time, manager Ruth Butler said.

Hot items at K Mart were video tape and Christmas wrap, Butler said, with Ninja Turtles, Batman items and Nintendo games all drawing lots of interest on the gift-giving front.

"There's lots of people out there saying this season's going to be flat, but I don't think so," Butler said. "We were light on sales before Thanksgiving, but it looks like people were just saving up for this weekend."

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