

TUCKER

The DeKalb NeighborTM

DeKalb County's Largest Circulation Newspapers

Vol. 23, No. 50

Neighbor Want Ads/427-9431

Tucker, Georgia — Wednesday, Dec. 9, 1992

25 Cents Per Copy

Growing DeKalb mall sales should give retailers Christmas spirit

By Scott Grant

Neighbor Staff Writer

Signs of a major consumer confidence upturn and big Thanksgiving weekend sales are expected to give DeKalb malls a joyous Christmas.

Early reports from key indicator stores found 21 percent and 18 percent sales increases the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving, said Wendell Kimbrough, South DeKalb Mall manager of sales and marketing.

"It's a phenomenal lead-in into one of the best Christmas seasons in the history of the shopping center," he said.

The mall expects a 15 percent Christmas sales increase over last year, Kimbrough said.

"It was a very strong, busy sales weekend (following Thanksgiving)," said Karen Kozemchak, Perimeter Mall manager of sales and marketing. "People have been shopping early and have been looking for the good value."

Some stores should have double-digit increases during Christmas, said Debbie Lowery, Northlake Mall marketing director.

"(Mall) traffic and sales have been up," Lowery said. "We've seen an upward trend the past few

months, and we're very optimistic about the Christmas season."

In contrast to the past few years, shoppers are patronizing early Christmas sales, rather than waiting for better deals, Ms. Lowery said.

Northlake Mall has experienced a little over 2 percent in sales increases for the year and 4 percent to 8 percent increases in October and November.

South DeKalb Mall has targeted the African-American market recently and sales have increased dramatically, including a 14 percent rise this year.

Perimeter sales have increased 8

percent for the year and the mall's 43 new stores have experienced healthy sales, Ms. Kozemchak said.

Kimbrough, Ms. Lowery and Ms. Kozemchak all said greater consumer confidence and pent-up demand from leaner times has led to more sales. Merchants say customers are happier and more confident this Christmas, Kimbrough said.

The upward sales trend really climbed in the last month, Ms. Lowery said.

"Several tenants have looked back to the presidential election when sales dramatically increased," she said.

Even though sales increases are across the board at Northlake Mall, stores with the most significant yearly gains should have the most successful Christmas, she said.

Denim and other good-value clothing have been especially popular.

"I don't think the customers are the impulse buyers they used to be," she said.

"The customer has been trained to shop sales," Ms. Kozemchak said. "Department stores are very promotional right now."

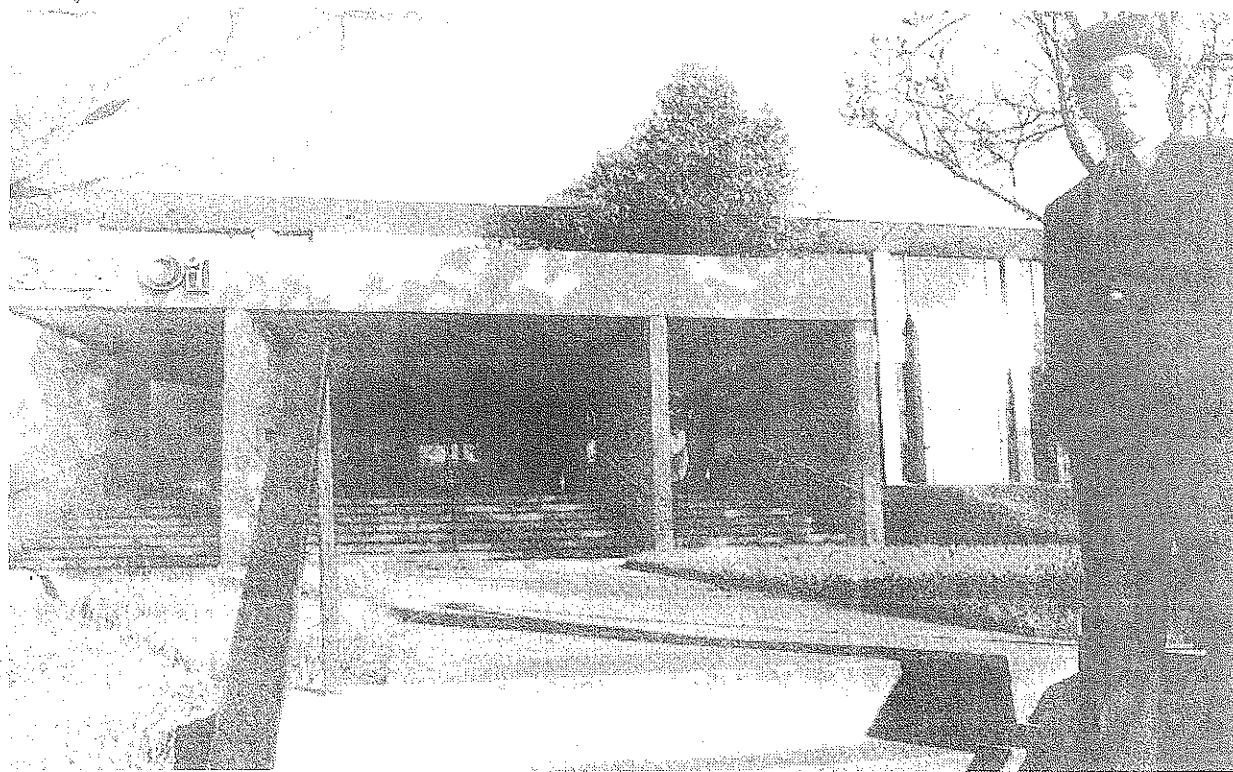
Jewelry, appliances, electronics, clothing and sporting goods stores are among expected big sellers

during the holidays.

South DeKalb Mall is in the second year of distributing Christmas catalogs to targeted African-American zip codes in southeast, southwest and northeast Atlanta, and south DeKalb. The mall is using television and radio advertisements to attract its Christmas market.

"(The advertising) ties right in with our strategy and positioning," Kimbrough said.

A black Santa Claus was a great success last year, and the mall will include a Mrs. Claus this year.



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