

Recession takes its toll on sales but Christmas bells keep ringing

By Eric Peterson

The spirit of peace and good will isn't the only thing that fills the hearts of retailers with joy during the Christmas season, according to some arera merchants.

"For any retailer, it's certainly the biggest selling season," said Jim Schall, manager of Thingsville, a gift and specialty shop in the Centrum shopping center at 12th and O streets.

December retail sales in Nebraska increased 27 to 31 percent over November sales for the last three years, according to figures from the UNL Bureau of Business Research. The figures also indicate January retail sales in Nebraska traditionally drop by about the same percentage.

Nationally, December retail sales jumped an average of 21 percent over November retail sales in the last two years, statistics from the U.S. commerce Department's Survey of Current Business show.

Appliances, clothing, and toys sell particularly well around Christmas time, UNL economics Professor Wallace Peterson said.

An official from Miller & Paine department store, 13th and O streets, confirmed that toys are a hot-selling item during the Christmas season, especially novelty items featuring characters like Smurfs or E.T. Doc Chaves, Miller & Paine's director of promotion, said E.T. dolls, "greeting cards, towels, light switches, you name it" are all selling good.

Schall said the Smurf and also Garfield the Cat items are selling well at Thingsville.

"Anything that's a licensed product is doing really well this year," he said.

Chanves said that military toys are coming back in style.

"Certainly, G.I. Joe has been revived," he said. "We aren't selling them over and above anything else . . . now they're just available and on the shelves."

One worry of area merchants is that the recession may hurt retail sales and businesses and dampen the usual December boost in purchases. Schall said the recession has affected sales at his store.

"I would say we're selling a lot more of the inexpensive gifts this year," he said.

Oddly enough, luxury items have fared well despite the recession and may continue to sell well during the

Christmas season, UNL Economics Chairman Craig MacPhee said. "The recession has not had as big an impact on the wealthy."

The real question may be whether the nation is climbing out of the recession or not, MacPhee said.

"We may be pulling out and not knowing it yet from the figures that we have."

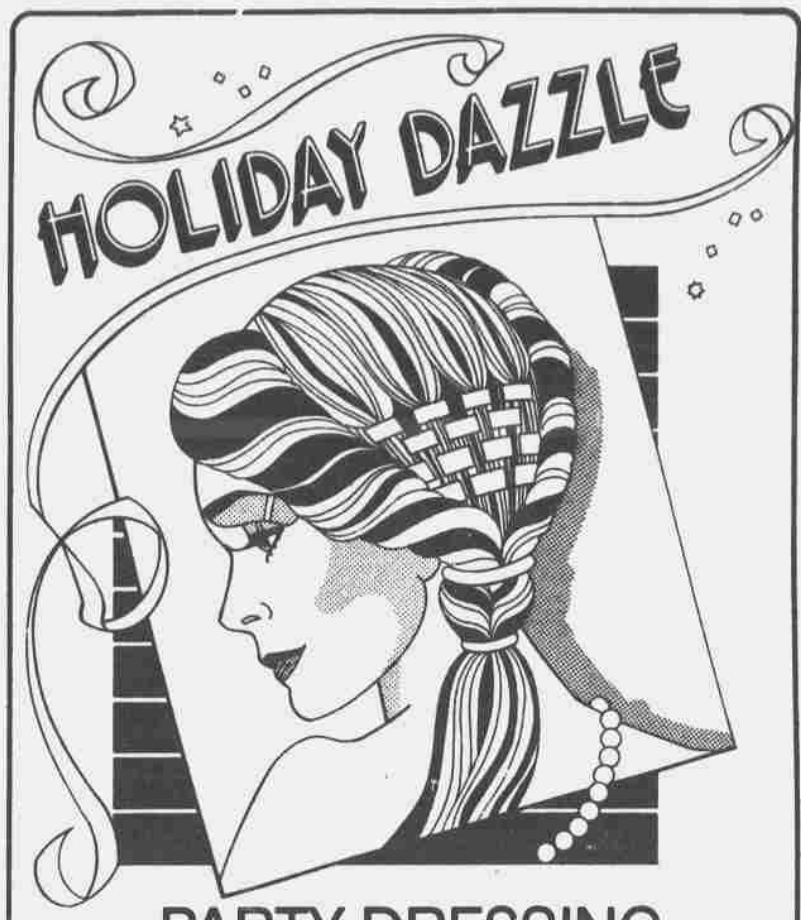
Christmas sales normally are lower during a recession, but MacPhee said that even if the recession continues, sales might be as high as usual.

"People may spend more on holidays to forget their troubles," he said.

Peterson said consumer confidence will determine the level of Christmas sales.

"Obviously, a recession usually dampens sales . . . but people may splurge a little bit just because there's a recession," he said.

Inventory buildup of certain items like cameras, a buildup caused by the recession, may temporarily lower prices and increase gift purchases, he added.



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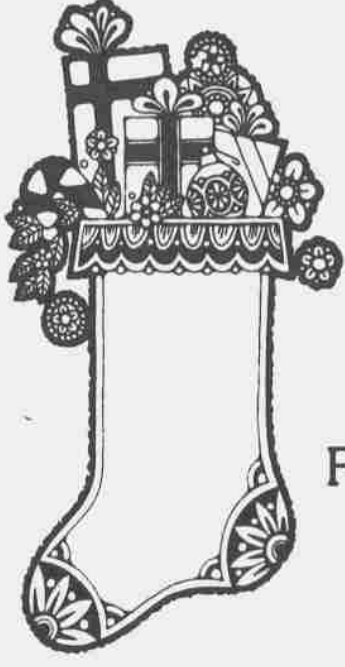


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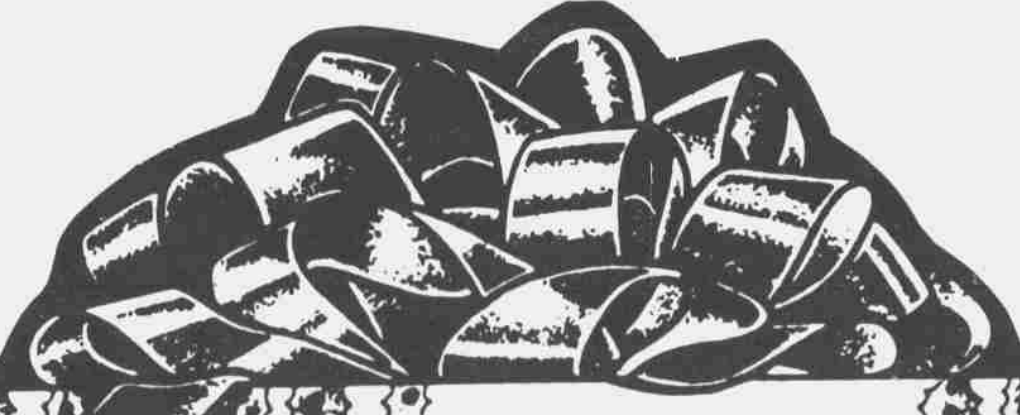
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