

Valley retailers offering deals, discounts, late hours

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Queen Creek resident Bryan Scalzo still has some Christmas shopping to do.

Like millions of other Americans, he's been hoping that the last weekend before the holiday will yield some great deals and last-minute markdowns on the perfect gift.

And that likely means he'll have plenty of company when he heads to Superstition Springs Center in Mesa to see what he can find. advertisement

"I will be out there battling elbow to elbow," said Scalzo, a light-rail consultant.

Nationwide, more than 35 million Americans have not begun shopping this year, according to the National Retail Federation.

Valley malls and stores are preparing for the onslaught with extended hours, quick-hit gifts and discounts.

A number of Westcor malls, for example, will be open until 10 p.m. Saturday, 8 p.m. Sunday and 6 p.m. Monday.

At Tempe Marketplace and Mesa Riverview, some big-box stores will be open as late as 11 p.m., giving shoppers time to grab last-minute stocking stuffers.

One department store is going even further.

La Curacao, which is located at Desert Sky Mall in west Phoenix and caters primarily to Spanish-speaking customers, will be open around the clock Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Wal-Mart also expects a flood of last-minute shoppers.

The nation's largest retailer will have extra registers open, surprise markdowns and displays of gifts for less than \$20, \$10 and \$5 for shoppers in a rush, said Daniel Morales, Wal-Mart's Southwest regional communications director.

A look at the numbers

Retailers have been aggressively wooing customers this holiday season given the tightening economy.

The National Retail Federation has predicted that holiday sales nationally would be up 4 percent this year over last, to \$474.5 billion.

If it holds, that 2007 predicted increase would fall below the 10-year average of 4.8 percent, the retail trade association said.

Arizona stores or malls would not release state-specific numbers.

But, with the weekend weather expected to be sunny and mild, retailers are anticipating large crowds.

“We expect a very big splash this weekend,” said David C. Malin, project manager for Vestar, developer of Tempe Marketplace and Desert Ridge Marketplace in Phoenix, adding that the predicted pleasant temperatures will be ideal for shopping at Vestar’s open-air centers.

Just how many people will be out shopping?

Consider: America’s Research Group says a full 53.4 percent of shoppers are holding off until the last minute for the biggest discounts possible.

The biggest procrastinators are men, according to the National Retail Federation. Nearly 20 percent of them have not started shopping, compared with 13.7 percent of women.

Scalzo, who will be shopping for jewelry and clothing for his wife, said he has put off his gift-hunting so he could research items and prices in newspapers and on Web sites.

“I’m going to be looking for the final deals,” he said.