

LET THE SHOPPING MARATHON BEGIN

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Clint Wolf/Beloit Daily News Brenda Anderson checks out some purchases at the Beloit ShopKo store Thursday. She and many other shoppers turned out on Thanksgiving to get a jump on Christmas shopping.

BELOIT - Businesses big and small are welcoming customers today as holiday shoppers begin the rush to find that perfect gift for their family and friends.

Ben Broge, store manager for the ShopKo at 2761 Prairie Ave., opened the Beloit store to holiday shoppers at 4 p.m. on Thanksgiving. The store will remain open until 10 p.m. today.

"I think it's the way retail is going now," he said of the marathon store hours for the holiday shopping rush. "We have to stay competitive."

Opening to shoppers on Thanksgiving has done well for the local store, as eager people line up outside each year.

"We have lines all the way down to the end of the building," Broge said.

Shoppers look for all sorts of bargains on Thanksgiving and Black Friday, but for the most part they are looking for electronics and a lot of toys.

"Drones, TVs, Hatchimals, and Star Wars items are big this year," he said.

Then, there are the surprise hot sellers.

"Last year, kitty litter was a big seller, because it was so cheap," Broge said.

The Beloit ShopKo has taken on more than 20 additional sales teammates to help during the holiday season. A lot of them will be kept on at the store after the holiday season is over, Broge said.

Elder Beerman opened its doors at the Eclipse Center at 11 a.m. on Thanksgiving and will remain open until 10 p.m. today. The home department at Elder Beerman seems to be among the most popular areas for holiday shopping, according to sales staff.

Betsy Schmiechen of the Villager Gallery and Frameworks, 429 E. Grand Ave., said she had been closed on Black Friday in recent years.

"I thought shoppers would rather go to the mall or bigger stores on Black Friday," she said. "But things are changing so much in the downtown and I think it really is becoming a destination."

She will be open today from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. - maybe even later - as the downtown will be bustling tonight with the Holiday Lighted Parade.

Schmiechen specializes in custom framing of art works, photographs and other items for customers.

"A lot of folks bring in their family mementos or something that is special to them," she said.

She said, what she does is give the customer's special item a new presentation by framing it. Her customers aren't really getting more things for the holidays - they are just enhancing the special items they already have.

Christine Drake, co-owner of Pizzazz Gift Boutique at 313 State St., said she is preparing for a busy three-day weekend for the downtown store, which will include Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and a holiday open house on Sunday.

"We will be serving refreshments to customers and there will be a drawing for gift certificates every two hours," she said.

Many of her customers shop for clothing and gifts for friends and family at her store. Then, there are some who like to get a little something for themselves while they're shopping for others, she said.

She and other downtown business owners also are looking forward to some popular downtown holiday events that draw big crowds to downtown Beloit - the Holiday Lighted Parade tonight, and Holidazzle on Dec. 1.

"Holidazzle is a really good event, so we are really looking forward to it," Drake said.