

Ready, set ... SHOP!

By **ROBERT CROZIER** Staff writer | Posted: **Wednesday, November 25, 2015 10:00 am**

BELOIT — Big bargains on the Friday after Thanksgiving are expected to again draw swarms of shoppers to retailers on the day customarily marked as the beginning of the holiday shopping season.

According to shopper Jennifer Vanlandingham, there's one main reason she will be among the thrifty throngs in Friday's wee hours: low prices.

"Black Friday is the day you get the deals," said the Beloit resident. "It's nice to be able to save money."

Vanlandingham and her husband have been hunting for post-Thanksgiving bargains since their first son was born nine years ago, and her friends say she takes shopping seriously.

"I'm not quite like the people you see on the extreme couponing shows, but I try," she said.

She picks a store by subscribing to emails from online sites and by scanning print advertisements, but she prefers having a physical ad in her hand when she's actually out shopping. As of Tuesday afternoon, she said she hasn't yet picked out this year's location.

"We try to shoot for just one store," she said. "Walmart has the best selection for us. But, unfortunately, they're only doing a Thanksgiving sale this year, so we're kind of up in the air."

She went shopping on Thanksgiving Day last year and didn't enjoy it, so she hopes to keep the post-feast excursion limited to Black Friday in the future.

When they arrive, they have a strategy. Her sister babysits their two kids so the husband and wife can work as a team.

"Usually we divide and conquer," she said, adding that they split up to beeline for different doorbusters.

"They go fast," she said.

The biggest shopping day of the year has changed over the years, according to Vanlandingham. And not all of the changes have been to her liking.

"It's gotten busier, if you can believe it," she said. "We're not real big fans of them moving it to Thursday, because we like to keep Thanksgiving about family."

Stores like Sears and Elder Beerman attempt to draw in shoppers before they've digested their big

dinners by kicking off the deals Thanksgiving night when football is still on TV. Sears at Morgan Square in Beloit will open at 6 p.m., and Elder Beerman at the Eclipse Center will open at 5 p.m.

“Last year it was really fun,” Elder Beerman store manager Sharon Carr said. “Customers were having a good time shopping with family members they don’t always get to shop with.”

The deals won’t even wait until Thanksgiving at the local Sears.

The Beloit, Burlington and Watertown Sears locations will be open from 5 - 8 p.m. Wednesday for what’s called Wish Wednesday, but only customers who donate \$5 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation will be allowed in.

The deals will be the same doorbusters that will be available after 6 p.m. Thanksgiving night and starting at 7 a.m. Black Friday, according to the store’s operations manager, Sara Ward. She added that they plan to restock between shopping days.

“We hope it’s going to be madness,” Ward said. “It has been in years past.”

Ward described the lines at the door and huge crowds that have characterized the shopping holiday in years past.

She said customers come out en masse for one reason: prices.

“People want to take advantage of the lowest prices available for the holiday season,” Ward said. “It’s a good thing ... It’s great to see customers who are out and supporting the store at 7 a.m. to get those great prices.”

As for the employees, Ward said they don’t mind working long hours over the Thanksgiving holiday.

“We all look at it as, it’s fun. It’s holiday time, it’s fun,” she said, adding that they are pleased the stores will open a little later in the morning Friday than they did last year.

Other stores, like Blain’s Farm & Fleet, endeavor to stay closed on Thanksgiving so their employees can be home with their families, according to Rockton Blain’s Farm & Fleet store manager Daniel Bierbrodt.

But Bierbrodt’s employees will still be expected to report bright and early the next morning so the store can open two hours early at 6 a.m.

“Right away in the morning, it’s very fun. It’s a very fun day to be a part of,” he said. “To work one is definitely an experience.”

The Downtown Beloit Association would like to propose an alternative: shop small on Saturday.

“It’s a way for the community to support small business,” Downtown Beloit Association Executive Director Shauna El-Amin said, adding that the deals won’t be as smashing and the crowds won’t be

as hectic as those found the day prior in the big box stores.

Small Business Saturday is bigger than just Beloit, and the whole thing is put together by American Express, according to El-Amin. The credit card company provided marketing materials to her association and is promoting a hashtag, #ShopSmall, El-Amin said.

While some of the more than 30 shopping locations in downtown Beloit will be open Friday, they likely won't have any special deals, El-Amin said.