

# Early reports suggest tax-free holiday a hit

## Weekend one of busiest in retail

By ROY L. WILLIAMS  
News staff writer

**T**he statewide sales tax holiday weekend has become the most lucrative event for retailers outside of the Black Friday weekend after Thanksgiving and the weeks leading up to Christmas, and officials at Birmingham area retail centers say the latest installment was no exception.

At Best Buy in Trussville, the store was packed Sunday, the last day of the tax holiday, and store officials said they saw huge demand for computers and related accessories. The Shops of Grand River in Leeds, the outlet mall that opened last October, also had brisk business during its first tax-free holiday weekend.

At Colonial Brookwood Village in Homewood and The Summit on U.S. 280, officials said both foot traffic and sales were up from Friday through Sunday.

"From what I've heard, it wasn't just the tax-free shopping that was up, but items in other categories as well," said Alicia Nelson, marketing

manager at The Summit. "The Summit sales promotion we held was a success, better than it was last year."

Though initial reports are good, Larry Fidel of the Alabama Retail Association, a trade group, said it could be weeks before state and industry officials can gauge how successful the tax-free holiday weekend truly was. "I haven't heard enough from our members to give you an answer," Fidel said Monday when asked to share his thoughts on how things went.

Alabama is among 17 states that hold tax-free holidays, in which participating municipalities and counties join the state in waiving taxes on certain items in promotions tied to back-to-school items such as clothing, shoes, computers, notebooks and other goods. A record 272 cities and counties participated this year.

Jefferson County was a notable exception, refusing to eliminate its 2 percent county tax for the second straight year because of its financial crisis.

Overall, the tax-free weekend was "good" compared to a year ago when the economy was on more shaky footing, said Jim Spahn, spokesman for Colonial Brookwood Village in Homewood.

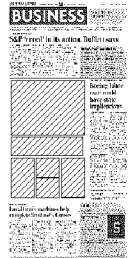
"We saw our biggest crowd on Friday, Saturday was up slightly and Sunday was modest," Spahn said. "From the stores I've talked to, there was no particular pattern in the types of merchandise that was moving. Sales were up across the board from a year ago."

Katherine McRee, co-owner of The Lili Pad and GiGi's in The Heights Village in Cahaba Heights, said business at the children's clothing and girl's boutique combination store was up from last year, and could have been better if not for the unexpected downgrade in the U.S. credit rating by Standard & Poor's that she says put consumers in a foul mood.

"We did a lot better on Friday than last year, but Saturday and Sunday crowds took a hit," McRee said. "I think it had to do with the lower credit rating."

EMAIL: rwilliams@bhamnews.com

See RETAIL | Page 4B





NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

A long line of shoppers gathers at the checkout counter at Altar'd State inside Colonial Brookwood Village. Mall officials say shoppers were out in force last weekend, taking advantage of the sales tax holiday on items from clothes to shoes, backpacks to computers.



NEWS STAFF/JOE SONGER

Brennen Cooke, left, checks out a blouse at Altar'd State in Brookwood Village while brother Chandler and mom Lisa look at other items inside the store.