

# Santa's Arrival



## Christmas Planning Begins Before Trees Are Trimmed

Copy provided by Briarcliffe Mall

Long before Christmas trees are trimmed, Briarcliffe Mall merchants begin preparing behind the scene for a time of year that most people look forward to and that is vital to any retailer.

In some cases, the Christmas season begins for some merchants as much as a year or more before ads begin running and displays begin appearing in stores. Merchants don't just decide three weeks prior to Thanksgiving that it's time to get out the decorations and welcome shoppers.

Because of the importance of the Yuletide season, which generally accounts for between 20-40 percent of a store's annual sales and as much as 60 percent of its profits, it pays to be prepared.

"When our customers are ready to shop for Christmas, we must be ready," says Linda Roberts, manager of Belk at Briarcliffe Mall. "This must be as smooth as possible for the customer and that

means getting ready sometimes 12-18 months ahead."

The first thing that most merchants must do to be prepared for the Christmas season is have plenty of merchandise. That means buying some items well ahead of the coming season.

"Some clothing items must be bought as much as a year-and-a-half ahead in order to get what is needed," says Roberts. "Then some items like candy need to be bought at the last possible moment to insure freshness."

After buying for the season, planning for Christmas actually begins as far as six months ahead. As Roberts puts it, "We begin thinking Christmas in June and July. And in some cases, we begin ordering visuals and planning color schemes a year ahead."

Once merchandise is bought, it begins arriving several months ahead of the Christmas season.

Frank McMichael, manager of JCPenney at Briarcliffe Mall, says he had to begin gearing up staff to receive merchandise around the first of October.

"We must constantly prepare

for Christmas," says McMichael. "After buying, we have to be prepared to receive the goods. When the Christmas season actually arrives, the sales staff must be ready as well as the maintenance staff. You don't just have a meeting and decide it's time for Christmas. It really takes quite a lot of planning and preparation."

After goods are bought and received, customers usually begin seeing some advertising in late October. The bulk of the holiday advertising comes in the months of November and December, however.

"When you get to November and December, the environment becomes extremely competitive," says McMichael. "That's when the bulk of the advertising must come in order to be effective."

Greg Pons, manager of Kmart at Briarcliffe Mall agrees. "Some ads promoting layaways begin in October, but most of our gift giving ads begin after Halloween and really get serious about Thanksgiving," Pons said. "The majority of our goods are bought in July and August and we usually have

about 25-30 percent more merchandise than normal for the Christmas season. Some of our merchandise goes out before Halloween, so it is important that our advertising is in place and ready to go."

Shortly after advertising begins, decorations follow. Wreaths and trees are decorated behind the scene as early as October, but most customers don't actually see the Santas, poinsettias and trees until November.

"The first week in November, decorating begins in earnest," Roberts says. "We do quite a bit in October, but the real push to decorate begins in November. We get some things out each week and then we bring in our maintenance staff, visual merchandising manager and staff and some of our key department managers and finish it up during a six-hour push in November."

And then... it's time to take care of the customers. And that means added sales and maintenance staff. And a heightened attitude toward the customer.

Roberts, McMichael and Pons each uses a similar philosophy when it comes to hiring additional staff. They usually use personnel that have experience at their stores and that means college students coming home for the holidays, teachers who have worked with them during the summer or retired men and women who have been part-time in the past.

"Getting a holiday staff together is very challenging," says Roberts. "We must have qualified sales people and our gift wrapping staff is very important. Customers sometimes have to wait to have packages wrapped and sometimes they want an item wrapped a particular way. Gift wrappers must have a 'people' attitude because this is a service."

McMichael feels customer service, whether it's sales or wrapping, is an attitude and an intangible that is of utmost importance.

"It doesn't matter how much we buy, decorate or prepare," says McMichael, "if our attitude toward the customer isn't good. That is the most important thing."

# WINGS

# Jeans For ALL

where the good stuff is always on sale!!! Large Selection of 1st Quality Jeans

Coupon Must Be Presented at Time of Purchase

**Levi's**  
JEANSWEAR

**STUDENT JEANS**

**\$12.99**

With Coupon

No Limit While Supply Lasts Expires 12/31/88

First Quality

LATEST STYLES With Coupon Only

*chic*  
by *h.i.s.*

**JEANS**

**\$19.99**

Reg. 40.00

Coupon Must Be Presented at Time of Purchase

\$200 OFF

already low discounted prices on any Mens or Ladies 1st Quality Sweaters

With Coupon Only

ANY SWEATSHIRT or SWEATPANTS

\$200 OFF

With Coupon Only

\*excluding sale items

Coupon Must Be Presented at Time of Purchase

**Lee**

**Men's BLUE JEANS**

**\$9.99**

With Coupon

Small & Big Sizes Only

No Limit While Supply Lasts Expires 12/31/88

First Quality

One Coupon Per Day

\$300 OFF

already low discounted prices!

ANY JEANS IN THE ENTIRE STORE

\*excluding sales items

PERSONAL CHECKS ACCEPTED

MENS • LADIES • CHILDREN  
SIZES FROM INFANTS TO XXL  
GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE

HEMMING AVAILABLE

Briarcliffe Mall  
Restaurant Row  
272-6351

OPEN 9-9 7 DAYS  
2 MYRTLE BEACH LOCATIONS  
Hwy. 501 at Waccamaw  
236-6200