

## Greater New Haven deal-seekers get jump on Black Friday (video, photos)



Customer wait to enter 25 at a time at the Toy r us on Universal Drive in North Haven the after it opened for the pre-black Friday sale at 8 p.m. vm Williams/Register

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ORANGE -- They call her "Best Buy Linda" for good reason.

The West Haven resident set up camp outside Best Buy at 11 a.m. Tuesday until midnight Thursday to be sure that she'd get the electronics her two teenagers and three young grandchildren who live with her want for Christmas: two televisions, a 40-inch and a 50-inch; a Playstation 3; an X-Box 360; a camera and a tablet computer.

"We've been saving buckets of pennies, nickels and dimes," she said. "My kids are going to be happy. My Thanksgiving will come Christmas morning when I see the expressions on their faces."

Linda, although extreme in her efforts, was among the die-hard bargain and "thrill" seekers who waited in line for area stores to open on Thanksgiving at various times, beginning with Walmart at 8 p.m.

At Target, where the doors opened at 9 p.m., a small line had formed by 6 p.m. and then would-be shoppers arrived in droves.

Lynn Cermola of Woodbridge and her daughter, Maggie Cermola, 16, were first in the Target line at 3:30 p.m. They brought plastic to sit on and fleece blankets, and planned to leave with at least one 32-inch television for \$200, towels for \$2 each and possibly other spontaneous bargains.

"Part of it was the fun to see if we could get here early enough to get the TV," Lynn Cermola said. "Part of the strategy is to make friends with the people in line," so as not to get trampled.

"We're not crazy," Maggie added.

But even if they are crazy, they're not the only ones.

Vicky and Jeff Cap, pros at the Black Thursday/Friday game, ate Thanksgiving dinner at noon, sent their children, ages 6 and 9, with their grandparents and "barely got to watch football," Jeff Cap said.

The town couple had a teamwork strategy: having already perused the floor plan, they planned to head separately to the hot-ticket items.

"The best part about this is talking to individuals (in line). You pretty much know their life history by the time it's done," Jeff Cap said. "You feel like your family has extended and grown."

Temperatures Thursday were mild, so the bargain hunters were lucky. The Caps have done the drill in snow, rain and wind.

While most folks were in search of discounts on more expensive items, many of them electronics, it was those same electronics that made waiting in line a little more bearable for some.

Isabelle Pierre-Louas of West Haven said she was probably going to read a book on her Kindle while waiting. Her family left dinner in Rhode Island early and since she had her boots and heavy jacket on, told her husband, "Drop me off," when they saw the line at Target was still small at about 5:30 p.m.

"This is like a first for me," to be so high up in the line, she said.

Back at Best Buy, with only about six hours more of waiting to go, "Best Buy Linda" was holding court and receiving holiday visitors in line. Her husband, George, who did all the Thanksgiving cooking, had brought her a plate of food. During store hours Tuesday and Wednesday, she used Best Buy's bathroom, charged her phone in the store, and said employees checked on her. At night, she slept in a neighbor's borrowed truck in the parking lot. Linda said her own car is broken and she didn't have the money to get it fixed -- it certainly wouldn't be at the expense of her brood's Christmas gifts. She went home to take a shower when replacement line-waiters relieved her.

Hellion Ruiz and his girlfriend, Alissa, both of Derby, were about fifth in line and talked like old friends with Linda, whom he'd met in line the previous year. Alissa sat in a chaise lounge, bundled up in a scarf, North Face jacket and two blankets, as she worked the cellphone and referenced the Best Buy flyer while taking "orders" from relatives.

Ruiz, a filmmaker who runs Hellion Pictures, last year made a video of mayhem in the Best Buy line -- and was prepared with a camera this year, just in case. But he used the video to show managers they needed barricades this year to keep the line single-file. He planned to buy a television, Playstation 3 bundle and external hard drives for the business, all on sale, to save about \$1,000.

"Anything to save a buck," Ruiz said.

He admitted that part of the draw to the style of shopping is the "adrenalin" rush, which he said for him only "starts at midnight."

"After this, I'm going to Kohl's, the mall, Macy's, Victoria's Secret and Yankee Candle," Ruiz said.

Linda, meanwhile, was planning after 60-plus hours to go home to her own bed and spend time with the kids.

"I would sacrifice my life for those kids," she said.