



# Casting fears aside

By Dawn Cobb

Halloween may be the beginning of a more profitable holiday season this year in North Texas as shoppers spend at 2008 levels, leaving the haunting 2009 season behind.

Some national economists suggest holiday sales could range from 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent above last year's shopping season — a season that begins with Halloween, encompasses Black Friday and ends in January with the post-Christmas sales.

Predictions from a national standpoint are the strongest in several years, according to Ian Pierce, director of corporate communications with Cencor Realty Services, which is now overseeing management at Denton's Golden Triangle Mall while its sister company, The

Weitzman Group, handles leasing.

"Since the D-FW area is one of the strongest economies in the country, we would hope to be doing better than that good number here," he said.

With job growth and an unemployment rate lower than

national figures, the combination could prove fruitful for the upcoming season.

"I'm not saying it's going to be great, but it's certainly looking better than what we were looking at in holiday 2009 or 2008. So everything's moving in the right direction," Pierce said.

As employers continue to add jobs and consumers' personal income increases, the North Texas region is on the recovery side of the recession, says Terry Clower, an economist with the University of North Texas' Institute of Applied Economics

Dallas Morning News file photo  
Billy Charalambopoulos stretches a dress to see if it will fit him while shopping for a Halloween costume at Electricque Boutique in Dallas.

One problem, however, remains: low consumer confidence across the nation.

"How this translates into the next three months, that's hard to say," Clower said. "I would expect that local folks feel a little more confident about spending."

Early economic predictions for Halloween show Americans spending an estimated average of \$66.28 on costumes, candy and decorations — up from \$56.31 last year and just under \$66.54 in 2008, according to a National Retail Federation report released in September

ICSC-Goldman Sachs' chain store sales index for the week ending Sept. 25 improved 0.4 percent on a sequential week-over-week basis, while sales momentum accelerated 3.6 percent year-to-year.

The national trends, coupled with increased sales tax allocations locally, portend a better season for Denton area businesses, officials say.

According to statistics compiled by the Texas comptroller's office, the 2010 payments to Denton coffers — at \$16.42 million — are up 11 percent from the \$14.76 million allocated during the same period last year. The most recent allocations show a 15 percent hike year over year.

"There for a while, we were seeing big drop," said Linda Ratliff, the city's economic development director. "Over the last five months, we've seen it pick up but at least it has been on that positive trend."

In recent months, a spate of new restaurants have opened their doors in Denton — from independent eateries to chain restaurants such as Freebirds World Burrito. Others will soon follow, including new Chick-fil-A and Whataburger locations and several new additions near the city's downtown Square.

In addition, the city could see a boost in sales tax from the opening of Denton's first Sam's Club and a second Walmart — both anchor stores in the new Rayzor Ranch Marketplace at U.S. Highway 380 and Interstate 35.

"I think we're starting to see that things are picking up in Denton," Ratliff said. "People are going to be cautious. They are going to spend more but maybe not as much as before [the eco-

The multimillion-dollar Rayzor Ranch development, on what used to be Rayzor family property, is well on its way to filling up the northern section of the 410-acre area. Updated plans for a town center on the southern side — complete with an entertainment district and a number of retail clothing shops — are expected to be revealed in the near future, with plans to open in late 2012.

The new management of Golden Triangle Mall — the visible anchor of the South Loop 288 retail shopping corridor — hopes to reveal plans soon for updating the 30-year-old mall. Currently, the mall is 97 percent occupied, and officials with the management companies hope to draw more nationally known tenants.

A plus for the 2010 shopping season will be the lack of orange cones and construction equipment following the years-long widening of Loop 288's southwestern section near the mall — a project that backed up traffic and limited accessibility to the city's only indoor shopping center.

Matt Ludemann, manager of Golden Triangle Mall, says the goal for the upcoming season is 5 percent growth in retail sales.

"We anticipate it will be a good holiday season, but there's still a lot of uncertainty in the environment," he said.

#### LOCAL SHOP PERSPECTIVES

Some local retailers are implementing new tools to reach customers and bring them in for holiday shopping.

Aida Zihuatanejo, director of marketing for Golden Triangle Mall, said the mall has several

plans in place for the season including handing out free gift cards and posting promotions on Facebook and the mall's website.

"The greatest challenge is making everyone else understand the importance of keeping our dollars in Denton," she said in an e-mail. "We want to continue to stimulate Denton and keep a positive outlook for our tenants, their employees — just simply moving forward."

Emma's Boutique, off Brinker Road, uses smartphone mobile alerts to update customers on its latest arrivals, said co-owner Crissy Camp.

Stephen Plyler, owner of The Antique Gallery, Western Heritage Gallery and The Antique Experience at Stonehill Center, is planning a Western show for Nov. 19-21. A benefit auction also is planned, along with food drives. Stonehill Center is located at North Loop 288 and Interstate 35.

"We always look at the holiday season as a time to give back," Plyler said in an e-mail.

Just a few doors down, June Schiada of PJ's Party Supply & Rentals has taken steps to boost customer service and promote "Collecting Costumes for Charity," a program that offers a discount for every used costume donated. All donations go to the Cumberland Presbyterian Children's Home.

"This last year we have focused more and more on customer service. We have expanded our rewards programs and our unique services to our customers," Schiada said in an e-mail. "We listen to what the customers are looking for and search for smaller, independent manufacturers that can fill those needs. We have reached out more on social networks and

become more involved in community efforts."

The longtime businesswoman says estimates from national economists appear to be on target, from her perspective.

"I believe consumers are still being careful with their finances and have some fear of the future; however, we have noticed an increase in spending," Schiada said.

Jimmy Tritt, who manages the family-owned upscale clothing shop J.T. Clothiers, says the city's growth in the retail industry has led to a concentration along the Loop 288 corridor, offering shoppers many choices they once had to travel to another city to find.

Ratliff agreed.

"We were at a place in Denton where we had so much retail leakage going on — people going to Lewisville, Frisco or wherever to shop," she said. "We have the market here already, so we're seeing the stores open right here."

In the 41 years since its doors first opened, J.T. Clothiers has seen several market fluctuation Tritt says.

"It's been a rough couple of years, but I'm cautiously optimistic," he said, adding that he hears the talk of economic concerns about the future but also believes Texas is lucky.

"I hope this Christmas and this season will be better," Tritt said.

Cover Story

DIBC

## HALLOWEEN, BY THE NUMBERS

This Halloween, the average person will spend:

- \$23.37 on costumes
- \$20.29 on candy
- \$18.66 on decorations
- \$3.95 on greeting cards

Of those surveyed in the 2010 Halloween Consumer Intentions and Actions Survey:

**72.2 percent** will hand out candy

**50.1 percent** will decorate their yards or homes for the season

**46.3 percent** will carve a pumpkin

**40.1 percent** will wear a costume (up from 33.4 percent in 2009)

**33.3 percent** will host or attend a party

**31.7 percent** will take children trick-or-treating

**20.8 percent** will visit a haunted house

**11.5 percent** will dress up their pets

Source: National Retail Federation



The Rayzor Ranch brand decorates an iron fence near a building at the development in April. Local shoppers have eagerly anticipated the retail arm of the mixed-use development since it was in the planning stages.

Photo by David Minton