



Anthony, center, and Deedra Hunter buy sweets at Truffle Berries Sweet Shop, in downtown Fairfield, Friday. Experts expect an uptick in consumer spending this holiday season, but it's not clear how much small businesses will benefit. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

[Fairfield](#)

Small businesses hope to share in holiday cheer

By [Todd R. Hansen](#) [From page A1](#) | November 09, 2015

FAIRFIELD — It will not be long before anyone visiting the Fairfield downtown will start seeing Small Business Saturday shopping promotions popping up, but there remains some doubt whether mom-and-pop stores will share in the holiday spending cheer.

“For small businesses, especially on the retail side and restaurants, the holidays are really important,” said Jack Mozloom, the national media director for the 330,000-member National Federation of Independent Businesses. “So we are holding our breath.”

More than 90 percent of the group’s members have fewer than 20 employees, and about 20,000 members are in California.

He said the past four or five years have been recession-like, and flat. The monthly National Federation of Independent Businesses survey of members for October also showed that there were virtually no plans to hire additional help for the holidays.

“That’s not good,” Mozloom said.

The good news for Solano County is there is more disposable income in people's pockets – and if they have money, they will spend it. The bad news is, they are likely to spend the lion's share at bigger retailers.

“My supposition is we will see the same proportions (of money going to small business) as we've seen in the past,” said Robert Eyler, interim dean of the School of Extended Education at California State University, Sonoma.

Eyler, who lived in Vacaville, said all the economic indicators show the holiday season is shaping up to be a good one overall. He said he believes the competition for the consumer dollar will mean more and bigger sales and likely showing up before Black Friday.

Holiday spending is expected to go up 3.7 percent nationally to about \$630 billion.

Margaret Manzo, executive director of the Fairfield Main Street Association, said the fourth quarter of the year actually tends to be the slowest for the group's members. That strongly suggests that the holiday shopping season largely passes by the downtown retailers.

But Manzo said there are niche businesses that seem to do very well, such as party supply and food shops and related event businesses, as well as specialty outlets like antique shops.

Wendy Diavatis-Lacy has created an edible niche for nearly five years at her Truffle Berries Sweet Shop on Texas Street in downtown Fairfield.

She said the holiday season has meant a 30- to 50-percent increase over her regular monthly revenues, though with the new restaurant and cost increases for her supplies, she still is not certain what to expect this year.

“With what we do, yes and no,” Diavatis-Lacy said about the holiday benefit on her cash register. “We do benefit because we do specialty stuff, but a lot of people are doing specialty stuff. . . . And now that we have the restaurant, people are going out and wanting to spend time together.”

The small-business owner said she already has people asking about holiday parties and other events, but said the orders tend to come at the last minute and so it is hard to judge what that will mean for the bottom line this year.

“I'm not sure what will actually happen,” she said.

Her most popular item is the PMS cookie, she said, but her berries and cupcakes sell out regularly, and she is seeing more people stopping in for breakfast (Wednesday through Friday) and lunch (Monday through Friday) since the restaurant opened three months ago.

The national trend shows that more money is being spent on nongift items, rising from \$126.37 per person to \$131.59. That group includes party expenses, the holiday survey said.

Small businesses also are competing with the online shopping, which represents about 46 percent of all consumers. And while some small retailers have carved out a share of that revenue pie as well, it certainly does not help generate foot traffic downtown.

Manzo said the Main Street Association is part of the American Express Neighborhood Champion program, so it will be getting Small Business Saturday “toolkits” to pass around to participating stores.

“It has lots of promotional and marketing material,” Manzo said.

The credit card company is not offering the same cardholder credits it has since starting the Small Business Saturday promotion in 2010, and instead has indicated it will spend that money on promotions and marketing. Its annual survey of small business forecast is scheduled to be released in the coming weeks.

Manzo said she is hopeful area residents will support the locally owned small businesses, but is not sure what will happen over the next month or so.

She does know one thing: Weather conditions matter.

“Last year it poured,” Manzo said, referring to Small Business Saturday. The result, she said, was a low turnout.

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