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'Tis the season to consume voraciously, buy nothing or give to charity

By Marie LeBlanc on December 5, 2013

Posted in Charitable Organizations Culture Economy & Business Our City Stories of Giving



Malls are busy since Black Friday kicked off the holiday shopping season.

Based on a modern American tradition, people from far and near, flocked together last week on Black Friday in hopes of finding great deals. Shoppers and non-shoppers packed the malls – some were there buying whatever they could while others were there just to see what was happening. There were even those who were dead set against the whole Black Friday phenomenon.

Ironically enough, this biggest shopping day of the year happened to fall on “International Buy Nothing Day”, a creation of Adbusters in Vancouver. In the podcast called “Buy Nothing Day” on Sustainable World Radio, Brian Highley of Adbusters challenges “the most voracious consumers in the world” to buy nothing for a 24-hour period.

“They pull people in by it being Black Friday when people come every day. It’s a ploy to get people here,” said one of the salespeople at a store in Polo Park, who asked to remain anonymous. “The deals in the stores are the same they would normally have.”

The mass confusion of demands from shoppers who flooded the Bootlegger clothing store had Abbey Olinyk and fellow employee Drew Sedor hopping most of the day. Both salespeople said, aside from working, they don’t really get caught up in the day’s shopping frenzy.

Olinyk said, instead of buying stuff, she donated money to the Salvation Army kettle “because it goes to good

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PHOTO OF THE DAY



On the bandwagon: a sign of the times at a local donut shop. No word yet on official bagels or perogies. PHOTO by Greg Petzold

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RIVER CITY 360

causes," while Sedor said he doesn't shop on Black Friday because he is saving his money for other things.

In fairness to consumers, many were shopping on Black Friday due to their financial situation. They wait for this day because it's difficult to purchase even the necessities of life at the best of times, let alone gifts for family and friends.

When shopper Corey Toews heard of Buy Nothing Day, he said he had mixed feelings. While he agreed with the idea of protesting commercialization of the holidays, he thought it went against some deeply engrained ideas in society where meaningful celebrations are usually followed by utter chaos.

Toews pointed out that while Thanksgiving prompts families to be grateful for what they have, and Christmas encourages peace and good will towards all humankind, these special events are followed by days that bring out the worst in people, namely Black Friday and Boxing Day. He added, that's when the shoppers emerge, determined and sometimes crazed in their pursuit of the great deal, trying to satisfy a desperate need to shop.



Abbey Olinyk tosses jeans to fellow Bootlegger employee Drew Sedor.



Shopper John Georgison waits while his wife shops.

Another shopper, John Georgison, who was carrying a few bags of merchandise, was waiting for his wife.

"I am the mule," he said, and my wife is the one who has all the ideas, while I carry everything. He said he texted her but she's nowhere to be found.

Georgison said he heard about "the Adbusters guy" in Vancouver who started Buy Nothing Day.

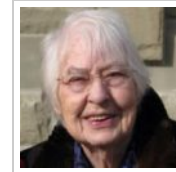
"It's a good anti-consumerism message he was trying to get out," he said. "Christmas is crazy enough," and people need to realize there is more to the holiday than what is under the Christmas tree, and that it's about family and friends and being together, he added.

Traveling with guitar in hand, all the way from Arviat, Nunavut, "where it's -42 celsius", family man and business owner Warren Kuksuk said he was here to spend time with his family and to purchase equipment for his company. Due to exorbitant shipping costs, Kuksuk comes to Winnipeg three times a year to buy parts for his business back in Arviat, where he does his best to keep a taxi, truck rental and ambulance service running in the small Inuit hamlet.



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LOCAL HEROES



Stepping up to the plate

By Heather Emberley / Gracie Sweetstory on May 3, 2017

Remembering the retired teacher who lived her commitment to social justice when she pioneered the concept of a food bank in Winnipeg.

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Warren Kuksuk travels from Arviat, Nunavut, to shop in Winnipeg.

Kuksuk believes this is the season to be with family and friends, playing his guitar, and giving back to the community. He said he donates to charity and to fellow Arviat residents on a regular basis; one way being through the local food bank. He said, he would like to think he shows compassion and love for everyone on a daily basis.

Over by the Polo Park Christmas tree, near the Salvation Army donation kettle, Luis Reis was also waiting for his wife while she shopped. Reis said his thoughts were of those less fortunate.

"People should be donating their cash to the Salvation Army," he said. "If they feel so good about all the deals they are getting on Black Friday, they probably have a lot to give thanks for, so I am sure they should be giving some of their money back to the Salvation Army."

When asked about Buy Nothing Day being on the same day as Black Friday, Reis chuckled.

"How ironic, I think that makes sense because there are a lot of people who are just opposed to being in stores during this time of year and getting involved in the sales," he said. "I think it is good for people to stand up sometimes and just go against the grain; go against the flow; avoid the herd instinct and just challenge Black Friday and stand alone."

Beatrice Barnard and Terry-Lynn O'Brien, with Winnipeg West Lions Club, were both manning the Salvation Army's donation kettle. The annual Kettle Campaign began six Fridays before Christmas this year.

Barnard and O'Brien said that donations were slower than they would have expected at Polo Park on Black Friday, but they noticed there were some larger single amounts going into the kettle, like a \$100 dollar bill.

Barnard and O'Brien also reported anecdotally, that people were giving for many reasons: several donations were from people who have been helped in the past; others talked about the Salvation Army being there in times of need; some said they are fortunate and why not share the wealth; and there were those who said they have the change in their purse just sitting there, so why not donate it to a charitable cause.

One man relayed a story on how the Salvation Army helped him, and how they cleaned up the town where



Luis Reis takes a rest beside the Polo Park Christmas tree.



(L-R) Terry-Lynn O'Brien and Beatrice Barnard.

there was a tornado, and rebuilt his house. He now shows his gratitude by donating on a regular basis.

The Salvation Army is known as one of the first relief agencies on the ground when disaster strikes around the world, along with the Red Cross and United Nations, working in conjunction with Lions Club International.

When there is a fire, it is Salvation Army soldiers who are the first ones called for help by the fire department. They provide shelter, clothing, food banks, and housing for many people in need.

Several people who came by the kettle to donate said they felt this was a time of year to give and to be with family, instead of just falling into the hype of shopping.

Some reported celebrating Christmas in a unique way by making donations to an organization in people's names to whom they would normally give a gift. Still, others put the

money in a hat and donate it to an organization instead of giving gifts to each other.

The over-commercialization of Christmas has pushed some people to get back into the tradition of family, friends, and of course food, where the holiday is a time of sharing. There are those who make a day of it with their family, prior to Christmas, when they create gifts from the heart such as crafts or baking.

All in all, throughout the chaos of Black Friday, one could feel a sense of peace, knowing there were many people in the shopping malls, some racking up the bills while others were prepared to do more than just shop. Some vowed not to shop at all, while still many others chose to provide support to charitable organizations and to help the communities in which they live.

All photos by M. LeBlanc

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About Marie LeBlanc

Marie is an artist, poet, photographer, with a background in alternative health and Bachelor of Arts in Human Geography and Sociology (Advanced Major). She advocates and has been active in many committees to create awareness for people with various disabilities. She was awarded the Mental Health Volunteer Hero of the year in 2012 and has helped coordinate mental health walks. Marie believes creative expression through art and entertainment is healing for your body, mind and soul. She is extremely inventive, creative and resourceful. Other Interests include the environment, culture and just about anything due to her curious nature. She enjoys and has learned a lot through her experience writing and taking pictures for the community news commons.

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