

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Black Friday Shopping Not Like Before, But Tradition Lives On In St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- In years gone, residents hunting deals would overwhelm the entrances of Kmart (east and west) and Radio Shack well before 5:00 a.m. on Black Friday. Even jewelry stores would open early back then, as shoppers hopped from one outlet to the next, buying items that had been heavily discounted.

This morning, however, the scene was much different. There were shoppers, but the rush and excitement were gone. And while the Sunny Isle parking lot used to be filled with vehicles, this morning shoppers easily found space. "I was just talking to someone about this," said a security guard near Kmart, referring to how Black Friday turnout has dwindled. "It's not like before. People are just not shopping like before."

Indeed, Radio Shack, long known for offering deals on Black Friday, did not open at 5:00 a.m. this year. There was no rush at Kmart East, and the Sears Appliance Store in the Sunny Isle Annex, near the office of the Elections System of the Virgin Islands, was nowhere near capacity.

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Many blame the drop in Black Friday early morning shopping on multiple factors, including the anemic economy, which has struggled to regain footing since the closing of the HOVENSA refinery. Others contend that online shopping has dented the sales of traditional brick and mortar stores, as shoppers find more attractive deals through Amazon and Walmart. One shopper who'd rather not be identified said the lack of tax refunds -- which the government said would be [available by Thanksgiving](#), then [renege](#)d -- kept would-be shoppers at home.

But if the lack of funds have diminished participation in Black Friday shopping, the spirit of the event lives on. At Office Depot in Sunny Isle, shoppers began arriving after 4:00 a.m., until a decent line had formed. A line also formed at Kmart West, and once the doors opened, people rushed for carts and deals, according to Laretta Petersen, St. Croix district chairwoman of the Democratic Party. Ms. Petersen, who enjoys the thrills of Black Friday, said there were no lines at the cashiers, another sign of weak participation.

And not all those who came out early actually bought items, according to two other people who were at Kmart West. "The layaway line was long," said Crystal Lynch, who also revealed that it was her first ever Black Friday early morning experience. Both Ms. Lynch and her husband, Lawrence Lynch, said they enjoyed the experience and would do it again.

At Home Depot, which had a line comparable to that of Office Depot, (although a police officer assigned to monitor Black Friday shopping said Office Depot's was longer), residents waited patiently outside as the store -- set to open at 6:00 a.m. -- offered deals on a variety of items, including appliances, Christmas trees, tools and more.

The atmosphere at the locations this reporter visited was subdued. There was little rushing because not many people turned out, and people didn't feel threatened about missing out on deals. But the spirit of the event lives on, with some residents admitting that while they hadn't purchased items, the excitement of waking up early and heading out to various stores keeps them coming back.