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Vermonters get out – early – for ‘Black Friday’ bargains

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...”We’re hoping here, with the Canadian dollar so strong, we’ll get an extra bump,” said Tasha Wallis, executive director of the Vermont Retail Association. She said the Chittenden County area would be most likely to feel that boost.

She said JC Penney wasn’t the only store to see large, early crowds. She said Best Buy in Williston conducted rehearsals with employees in preparation for today’s shopping turnout, and Wal-Mart brought in every available staffer.

“It’s really quite remarkable,” she said, “I think for some people it’s a real kick-off event for the shopping season. They’re there for the scene as much as the bargains. Wallis said the big-box stores and malls tend to see the larger, early crowds. But shoppers often move downtown in the afternoon for a quieter scene and to visit the smaller stores.

She said Black Friday is viewed as a signal of the overall health of the retail industry. She said sales are expected to be sluggish nationally, although Vermont’s economy might fare better because the state has been somewhat insulated from the mortgage crisis. Wallis pointed out that retail is a strong part of Vermont’s economy, accounting for 19 percent of non-agricultural jobs (there are 59,000 retail jobs in Vermont). She said retail collected \$800 million in sales tax for the state in 2006.