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Many happy returns Stores busy with exchanges and post-holiday sales

*By Dawson Raspuzzi
Herald Staff*

As people flitted in and out of stores around Rutland on Friday, almost as many bags went in with returns as were taken out with purchases.

"I've got one 6-1/2 and one 7-1/2 and two right feet," said Denise Cross of Rutland, who was at Walmart returning mismatched winter boots she unwrapped Christmas morning. "After this we've got to go to the mall and return some other boots with a hole in them."

Approximately 10 people were at the customer service desk at Walmart in a line marked "returns" with arms full of bags of clothes and other items at around 11 a.m.

Dave Heibler of Fair Haven was returning additional plates from a dinner set he and his wife received to exchange them for additional pieces to the set they still needed. Afterwards, Heibler said, he would be heading to the Diamond Run Mall to buy an additional link to a watch he got his wife for Christmas.

While many, like Cross, were looking for the same items at a different size or color, others were returning gifts that fell a bit short of expectations in order to get that overlooked item on their list.

Michael Wayne, 15, walked out of Walmart and immediately took his new Guitar Hero Xbox 360 video game from the shopping bag to read the back cover.

"I had to take back some clothing; I returned some jeans that didn't fit, belts, shirts I didn't particularly like," said Wayne, of Fair Haven. "Then I got a game with it."

While looking around the store, Wayne said he found a special on the two-pack video game at almost half-price.

"It's a little busier (the day after Christmas) but stores have more deals because they're trying to get rid of their old stock, so it's worth it," Wayne said.

Tasha Wallis, executive director of the Vermont Retail Association, said people

like Heibler and Wayne aren't alone, and that nationally around one-third of recipients return or exchange gifts they are given following the holidays. Although there are not specific numbers for Vermont, Wallis said the number is assumed to be similar in the state as well.

Other people hit the mall and downtown stores empty-handed and made their way through the aisles to bargain shop.

"I'm not exchanging anything today; everybody was happy," said Brandie Cottrell of Clarendon. "I'm here looking for Christmas specials."

As well as the deals, Cottrell and her family were looking for a Nintendo Wii gun to use for a pair of hunting video games the kids got for Christmas.

Howie Pappy, of Rutland, said he was also brought to the mall to look for day-after-Christmas sales.

"Everything went good for Christmas but I came because I might find some good bargains," he said. "In the past I've found things half-price, so I'm going to look around."

With slumping sales this year, many stores are offering even greater discounts than in past years in hopes of making up for the shortfall.

"We've seen a lot of deep discounting even prior to the Christmas holiday and we anticipate the traditional after-Christmas discounts to be similar," Wallis said. "People are a lot more bargain-conscious than they have been in the past — price is a motivator even more than customer service and a lot of things."

While most people came to either spend money or gift certificates received at Christmas, a few last-minute shoppers still had a few items on their lists.

Deb Trombley, of Rutland, said she was getting a couple of gift certificates for her husband to give as presents to people who they didn't see on Christmas.

"I just need to grab some gift certificates," Trombley said. "There isn't anything else I need; I got it all for Christmas."

Contact Dawson Raspuzzi at dawson.raspuzzi@rutlandherald.com.