

## A treat for retailers



Americans went shopping in September, but only when they thought they were getting a deal. Still, retailers are expecting sales to increase for the holidays. REED SAXON/AP

# Consumers expected to buy more for holidays

By Jenny Munro

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Consumers still feel the pinch in their spending, but retailers expect holiday shopping to be average — up 2.8 percent during the last two months of the year over 2010 figures.

However, consumers aren't waiting until the winter holidays to hike their spending. The National Retail Federation cited a survey showing that consumers expect to spend \$72.31 on decorations, costumes and candy, up from \$66.28 last year. Of that, \$21.05 will be spent on candy for those ghosts, Harry Potters and princesses knocking on

their doors as well as the parties they hold.

Although Halloween spending is growing, the main holiday season of the year is the winter holidays from November through December. And about 40 percent of consumers begin their winter holiday shopping before Halloween.

"I'll buy candy, but we've decided to make costumes this year," said Ruthie Gibson, a Greenville mother of four youngsters under the age of 8. "Halloween is fun for the kids and you have to celebrate. But we're not spending a lot of extra money. We're saving that for Christmas."

Gibson said she's been buying Christmas items for

most of the year to better manage her holiday shopping. That's necessary, she said, when neither she nor her husband are confident their jobs are secure.

Last year, the winter holiday season outperformed most expectations, with 2010 sales up 5.2 percent. This year's anticipated growth is considerably less, but it is slightly higher than the 10-year average of 2.6. That decade, however, includes 2002, when fallout from the 9/11 attacks and fears of future attacks slowed spending. Sales in 2002 were up 1.3 percent. The decade also takes in the recession years of 2008 and

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2009. Sales plummeted 4.4 percent in 2008 and declined 0.4 percent in 2009.

"Retailers are optimistic that a combination of strong promotions and lean inventory levels will help them address consumer caution this holiday season," said Matthew Shay, NRF president and chief executive officer. "While businesses remain concerned over the viability of the economic recovery, there is no doubt that the retail industry is in a better position this year to handle consumer uncertainty than it was in 2008 and 2009."

The nation has experienced 14 consecutive months of retail sales growth and household debt is down. But consumers are concerned about high unemployment numbers, relatively high gas prices, high food prices and the uncertainty of the stock market.

The season also could be a plus for the employment market. NRF said its holiday forecasting model indicates that retailers are likely to hire 480,000 to 500,000 seasonal workers for the holiday season. That's comparable to the number of seasonal workers who were hired last year.

As shoppers ready for the marathon winter holiday season, nearly seven in 10 Americans said in the NRF's 2011 Halloween Consumer Intentions and Actions Survey conducted by BIGresearch, that they plan to celebrate Halloween. That's a 5 percent jump from the year before.

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