

Black Friday boosts hopes



ROSS D. FRANKLIN / The Associated Press

A packer processes a package at an Amazon.com fulfillment center, in Phoenix.

Holiday sales off to encouraging start

Some wonder if shoppers will keep going or are tapped out

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NEW YORK — Holiday shoppers gave retailers a happy Thanksgiving weekend, crowding stores and malls more than last year.

Strong spending earlier this month and robust sales online has retailers smiling, particularly because many shoppers bought for themselves as well as gifts, though mostly where they saw bargains.

But retailers remain

unsure how much people will spend before Christmas in an economy that's still bumpy. Shoppers, grappling with an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent, remain careful about spending and driven by deals.

Discounts, particularly early-morning specials, were deep enough that many shoppers say they bought more than they had planned. But some say that means they're done, and they spent less than last year.

The heavy discounting and lower prices, particu-

larly on LCD TVs, held down overall spending. Friday, retailers at malls had sales of \$10.7 billion, an increase of 0.3 percent over last year, according to preliminary figures from ShopperTrak, which counts shoppers at 70,000 stores.

TV prices are falling almost twice as fast as they did earlier this year amid a glut. They're selling for 15-20 percent less than Christmas 2009.

Earlier buying in November stole some sales from Friday, said ShopperTrak co-founder Bill Martin. But 2.2 percent more customers came in to stores on Black Friday than last year.