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## Last-Minute Shopping May Counter Snow; Sales Forecast Unchanged

By Allison Abell Schwartz

Dec. 21 (Bloomberg) -- Last-minute shopping in the days leading up to Christmas may make up for lost weekend sales on the U.S. East Coast after record snowfalls shut stores early and kept shoppers at home, the National Retail Federation said.

The weather wasn't enough to prompt the trade group to revise its forecast for a 1 percent drop in holiday sales, said [Ellen Davis](#), a spokeswoman for the NRF. Some retailers may extend promotions into Monday and Tuesday to attract shoppers they had hoped to get during the last weekend before Christmas, she said yesterday.

"There are more than enough shopping days to make up any challenges due to weather in the east," [Matt Rubel](#), chief executive officer of [Collective Brands Inc.](#), said in an e-mail yesterday. Collective Brands, based in Topeka, Kansas, is the owner of the Stride Rite and Payless ShoeSource chains.

Retailers in the Washington area closed early on Dec. 19 and opened to fewer shoppers yesterday than is typical for the last weekend before Christmas. As much as 24 inches of snow fell on Bethesda, Maryland, while 16 inches were measured at the National Mall in Washington and 23.2 inches were recorded at Philadelphia International Airport, the [National Weather Service](#) said.

Shopping during the past weekend probably trailed the one following Thanksgiving, said Aaron Martin, a spokesman for researcher ShopperTrak RCT Corp., in an e-mail yesterday. The firm had anticipated the weekend would be the best of the season and in October forecast a 1.6 percent increase in total holiday sales.

### Extended Hours

Target Corp., the second-biggest U.S. discount chain, said yesterday that the majority of its stores in areas affected by the snowstorm will extend their hours to close at midnight Dec. 21 through Dec. 23. [Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#) and Toys "R" Us Inc. will also keep stores open longer than they did last year.

[Target](#), based in Minneapolis, rose 74 cents to \$48.24 Dec. 18 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading. Bentonville, Arkansas-based Walmart rose 9 cents to \$52.85.

Macerich's Tysons Corner Center, the Washington area's largest shopping mall with about 300 stores, closed early at 4 p.m. on Dec. 19, according to spokeswoman Rebecca Stenholm. Tysons Corner opened at its normal time of 9 a.m. on Dec. 20.

"Certainly the crowds are quiet this morning but we expect them to grow," she said in an interview yesterday.

Maryland, Virginia Malls

[Simon Property Group](#) Inc. and Westfield Group closed malls early in Maryland and Virginia on Dec. 19. All of Westfield Group's malls and shopping centers opened on time yesterday, said spokeswoman [Katy Dickey](#).

**Historically, the 10 days before Christmas have made up 40 percent of total holiday sales for November and December, according to [Joseph Feldman](#), a managing director at Telsey Advisory Group in New York.** The Washington-based National Retail Federation said last week that consumers had completed less than half of their holiday shopping, the lowest level since 2004, according to a survey by BIGresearch.

The luxury shopping section of Washington's Dupont Circle neighborhood was nearly deserted on Dec. 19. A family of three skied down the middle of 18th Street. At 2 p.m. the [AnnTaylor](#), Johnston & Murphy and Godiva stores on Connecticut Avenue were shut. Brooks Brothers closed at 1 p.m. instead of 6 p.m. "due to inclement weather!!" its sign said.

Act of God

"This is kind of an act of God," Jim Rosenheim, chief executive officer of Tiny Jewel Box Inc., a family-owned single-location jewelry business on Connecticut Avenue. "There's not a damn thing I can do about it. This is happening to every retailer up and down the East Coast."

Rosenheim, 67, said he hopes to recover on Monday through Thursday some of what otherwise would have been "hundreds of thousands" in sales, he said.

The Strand bookstore in Manhattan was on pace for a record sales day on Dec. 19 until the snowstorm worsened. The store had about \$125,000 in sales that day, compared with about \$137,000 on the Saturday before Christmas last year, said co-owner Nancy Bass Wyden.

"Up until 6:30 at night, we were headed to have the busiest day at the Strand, and then the weather definitely caught us," Wyden said in a telephone interview yesterday. "I guess people got scared away by the storm."

Earlier in the day on Dec. 19, [shoppers](#) rushed out to beat the accumulating snow. Angel Stallings, a 27-year-old from Brooklyn, made her way to the 42nd Street Toys "R" Us in Manhattan before returning to the Atlantic Terminal Target in Brooklyn to shop for her 6-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter.

New York Shopping

"I heard about the snow and I wanted to be done shopping before it got too bad," Stallings said.

Charles White, 30, of Alexandria, Virginia braved the winter weather to finish holiday shopping for his girlfriend at the Fashion Centre at Pentagon City in Arlington, Virginia. "I couldn't worry about the weather. This is the last weekend before Christmas and I have to do what I have to do," he said.