

Summer!

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Set

Ready.

Shop



Make a list, check it twice

With a little planning, holiday shopping can be a breeze

By Cathy Herholdt

Ready, set, shop! The holiday shopping season officially kicks off the day after Thanksgiving — known to those in the retail industry as Black Friday. For some, the thought of searching out the perfect gift for loved ones and returning with red and green packages is akin to the conquest of a hunting experience. For others, hours of wandering stores bewildered by what Aunt Mabel might want for Christmas brings on a sense

of dread.

Not to worry, with a little planning, a carefully crafted list and a budget, holiday shopping can be less stressful, time consuming and expensive than ever before, allowing you the opportunity to really enjoy the season.

Advice from the experts

Heather Nelson, founder of Holiday Assistants and its year 'round parent company, Champion Assistants, knows that preparing

for the holidays causes many people stress. She came up with the idea to expand her personal assistant business to include specific holiday tasks after hearing women at a networking meeting fretting about the holiday season — in June! Her company helps clients with decorating services, preparing holiday meals in their homes and by providing personal shoppers who can either go shopping with you, or take your list and do it for you.

Nelson always creates shopping lists

with her clients, recommending shoppers be specific with well-thought-out gift ideas for each person, before heading to the mall. She also suggests setting a budget for each person and sticking to it.

Make it meaningful

"I've always enjoyed buying gifts for people because I'm pretty intuitive about what people like," said Nelson, who steers clients away from buying a gift because they'd like it for themselves. "The idea is to tune into others' needs." Consider the personality of the person and their interests. If you're stumped to find a meaningful gift, think about things you've enjoyed doing together and get a gift that relates to that activity, such as a GPS for someone you've enjoyed camping with. "It's always nice to give a somewhat personalized gift," she added.

"Experience" gifts are always a hit as well, Nelson said. She recalls one family who received a hot air balloon ride for all four of them. Such gifts create memories for years to come. "It's an activity people share and they talk about it later," she said. Giving meaningful gifts requires just a bit of forethought to be successful.

Be efficient

Buying gifts in bulk, such as wine baskets for each of your neighbors or co-workers, is a great way to save time when shopping, explained Nelson. You can still personalize each one with specific colors or additional items. Check online for gifts before you go

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shopping, and hit the stores during off-peak hours, such as weekday mornings, to avoid larger crowds. And stick to your list — this is not the time to pick out a new pair of shoes for yourself. “Oftentimes clients will see things for themselves, and that’s what takes time,” she said.

Sticking to a budget can help make the process less painful and more meaningful too. “People have a misperception that the more you spend, the more you care about the person,” said Nelson. “It’s really about finding meaningful gifts.”

Head out early

Black Friday will kick off earlier than ever at Alderwood in Lynnwood. The mall is hosting its first-ever Rockin’ Shoppin’ Eve, beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 23. The event actually begins at 10 p.m. on Thanksgiving night with live music and mall doors opening at 12:01 a.m., so if you wake from your post-Thanksgiving nap and feel a burst of energy to start your holiday shopping, the stores will be open with plenty of coffee available.

The newly remodeled Northgate Mall opens bright and early at 5 a.m. on Black Friday with early-bird shoppers’ flyers being handed out by knowledgeable greeters, who can also direct shoppers to all the new stores and restaurants at Northgate. The parking deck with a sky bridge to the south entrance of the mall makes for convenient parking, and gift wrapping services are available for a donation in front of Nordstrom.

“We do recommend the earlier the bet-

ter,” said Northgate Mall Area Director Strategic Marketing Sarah Bonds.

Most malls have extended hours during the holiday season, so late night or early morning trips can also save time due to smaller crowds. Whenever you go, Bonds suggests adding a joyful holiday attitude to your gift hunting. “Allow yourself plenty of time and enjoy yourself!”

