

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

When people shopped downtown

Hard to believe, but downtown Pottstown once had a big traffic congestion problem at this time of the year.

Let's take a peak at two 1971 Mercury articles at the beginning of the Christmas season:

Thousands of shoppers crammed into the downtown area Friday to look and buy.

Promptly at 10 a.m., a motorcade featuring Sally Starr (a Philadelphia children's TV personality), Dr. Shock, Willy the Clown, Santa Claus, Mayor Brower B. Yerger, and Police Chief Richard J. Tracy (yes, Dick Tracy was his real name) roared into town.

Shoppers had to be content to crawl into the downtown area, however, as traffic was backed up in many areas. Once arriving, they flooded into area stores in numbers as large as any to be seen in recent years.

Harry Hoffman, partner in the New York Store, High and Penn streets, said the volume of shoppers was as heavy as he has seen in recent years. "We had a little tie up, giving out tickets to the Sally Starr show when we first opened, but everything was straightened out quickly.

The New York Store distributed free tickets to children for two shows given at the Towne Theater, 220 High St., by Sally Starr, Dr. Shock, and Willie the Clown.

When asked if he anticipates his best year ever, Hoffman replied "We're hoping for it. I wouldn't have believed we'd have such a good season three weeks ago, but now I feel it's a definite possibility." He estimated the crowds in the store at several thousands.

Across the street at Ellis Mills (then a women's wear store, now a micro brewery) William Lawrence, president, found the turnout to be very good indeed. "The lovely weather was an important factor," Lawrence reasoned. "After the cold weather we've had lately, people are realizing that winter really is coming and the pleasant weather today gave them an opportunity to buy coats and gloves they have been putting off buying."

Lawrence said he is expecting an excellent season this year. "I believe that most area merchants are well-stocked in anticipation."

At Sears and Roebuck, Norco (now Coventry) Mall, Philip Hess, assistant manager, agreed that the flow of customers was heavy Friday. "The parking lot is completely full," he beamed, "and people are buying as well as browsing."



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Christmas time is toy time, and Frank Carelli, owner of Town Toy, 363 High St., (now Advance Auto) was delighted by the deluge. "It was packed today. Businesswise, it's the best after Thanksgiving Day I've ever had."

Corelli said that this year more people are buying and looking, and layaways are climbing. "I have 40% more layaways this year than last year," he said. "He noted that road racing sets, train sets, and craft sets are extremely popular."

Motorists annoyed by "normal" traffic

Daily commuters to Philadelphia or other large cities are used to tie ups, but many area residents got a surprising taste of what snarled traffic is like Friday as they attempted to enter Pottstown.

One resident claimed it took him 15 minutes to travel the three blocks from the Hanover Street bridge to Hanover and King streets, while another motorist fumed that she had to wait for four traffic lights to change at King and Charlotte Streets before she could go around the corner.

Whether such conditions were isolated or a common occurrence were subject to considerable debate, as Police Chief Richard Tracy asserted he was unaware of any intolerable traffic conditions in Pottstown.

"Certainly we had a certain amount of congestion," he said, "but this is to be expected for the opening day of the Christmas shopping season.

"We did have two policemen rerouting traffic on High Street at Charlotte and Hanover streets for 20 minutes during Santa's motorcade on High Street to protect children crossing the street. I am aware there is a certain amount of congestion because of this rerouting, but it couldn't be helped."

It's great to order just about anything on the internet and have it delivered to your door in a day or two.

The outlets and big box stores have ample parking. But like many others, I really miss our traditional downtown.