

Police: 2 Shot At Walmart Over Parking Space

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Authorities believe a disagreement over a parking space led to two people being shot and wounded outside a Walmart in Tallahassee, Fla.

Police say officers responded to the shooting shortly after noon on Black Friday, one of the busiest shopping days of the year. A man and a woman — discovered at the store's outdoor garden center — were taken to a nearby hospital with wounds that were not considered life-threatening. They were expected to make a full recovery.

No arrests were immediately made, but police were searching for a dark green Toyota Camry in connection with the case.

Gas Explosion Levels Building; Several Hurt

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (AP) — Authorities say a natural gas explosion has leveled at least one multistory building in the largest city in western Massachusetts and a number of people have suffered significant injuries.

A spokesman for Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno says there's no word on whether there have been any fatalities in Friday evening's blast.

The explosion happened shortly before 6 p.m. and sent bricks and glass flying through downtown streets. Police Sgt. John Delaney says authorities are evacuating the commercial and residential area.

A witness in a nearby barbershop tells WWLP-TV he heard a loud explosion that knocked him to the other side of the store. He says he looked up the street and saw one building severely damaged.

The station reports two buildings have been damaged and the blast was felt miles away.

Abbas Determined To Win UN Nod For Palestine

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) — After bitter rival Hamas held its own in a fierce battle with Israel, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has no choice but to override U.S. objections and seek U.N. recognition of a state of Palestine next week, his aides said Friday.

But even such recognition, likely to be granted, may not be enough for the Western-backed backed proponent of non-violence and a peace deal with Israel to stay relevant and counter the soaring popularity of Gaza's Hamas militants.

Abbas — formally the leader of all Palestinians but only in charge in parts of the West Bank — was in trouble even before being relegated to the role of spectator as Israel and Hamas fought for eight days, starting Nov. 14, then negotiated a truce with the help of Egypt that could lead to easing Israel's long-standing Gaza border blockade.

By comparison, years of effort by Abbas to negotiate the terms of a Palestinian state with Israel have led nowhere.

His West Bank government has been buckling under the worst cash crisis in its 18-year existence, sparking widespread domestic discontent. And Hamas, which seized Gaza from Abbas in 2007, emerged from regional isolation after the Arab Spring uprisings brought its parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, to power in key countries, including Egypt.

Morsi Opponents, Backers Clash In Egypt

CAIRO (AP) — Thousands of opponents of Egypt's Islamist president clashed with his supporters in cities across the country Friday, burning several offices of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the most violent and widespread protests since Mohammed Morsi came to power, sparked by his move to grant himself sweeping powers.

The violence, which left 100 people injured, reflected the increasingly dangerous polarization in Egypt over what course it will take nearly two years after the fall of autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Critics of Morsi accused him of seizing dictatorial powers with his decrees a day earlier that make him immune to judicial oversight and give him authority to take any steps against "threats to the revolution". On Friday, the president spoke before a crowd of his supporters massed in front of his palace and said his edicts were necessary to stop a "minority" that was trying to block the goals of the revolution.

"There are weevils eating away at the nation of Egypt," he said, pointing to old regime loyalists he accused of using money to fuel instability and to members of the judiciary who work under the "umbrella" of the courts to "harm the country."

Clashes between his opponents and members of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood erupted in several cities. In the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, anti-Morsi crowds attacked Brotherhood backers coming out of a mosque, raining stones and firecrackers on them. The Brothers held up prayer rugs to protect themselves and the two sides pelted each other with stones and chunks of marble, leaving at least 15 injured. The protesters then stormed a nearby Brotherhood office.

Powerball Jackpot Grows To Estimated \$325M

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Black Friday shoppers in many cities briefly detoured into lottery retailers, drawn off task by the prospects of winning a \$325 million Powerball jackpot — the fourth-largest in the game's history.

Chicago resident Clyde Gadlin, 65, emerged from the bustle of holiday shoppers on Chicago's Michigan Avenue, to stop in at a 7-Eleven to buy his daily batch of Lottery tickets, including Powerball.

For him, the game is a chance to dream — a single winner's cash payout would be nearly \$213 million before taxes — and he tries not to let the long odds burst his bubble.

Lottery officials say they're unsure what effect Thanksgiving and beginning of Christmas shopping season will have on sales, which normally pick up in the days before high-dollar drawings.

If he wins, Gadlin said, he'd journey back to his grandfather's farm in Heidelberg, Miss., where he spent part of his childhood.

Black Friday Creeps Into Thanksgiving

BY ANNE D'INNOENZIO
AP Retail Writer

This season could mark the end of Black Friday as we know it.

For decades, stores have opened their doors in the wee hours on the day after Thanksgiving. But this year, major chains such as Target and Sears ushered customers in on Thanksgiving itself, even before the turkey leftovers had gotten cold, turning the traditional busiest shopping day of the year into a two-day affair.

Despite an outcry from some employees, both stores and shoppers seemed to like it. Some people went shopping with a full belly, going straight from the dinner table to the stores. Others slept off their big meal and went to the mall before daybreak on Black Friday.

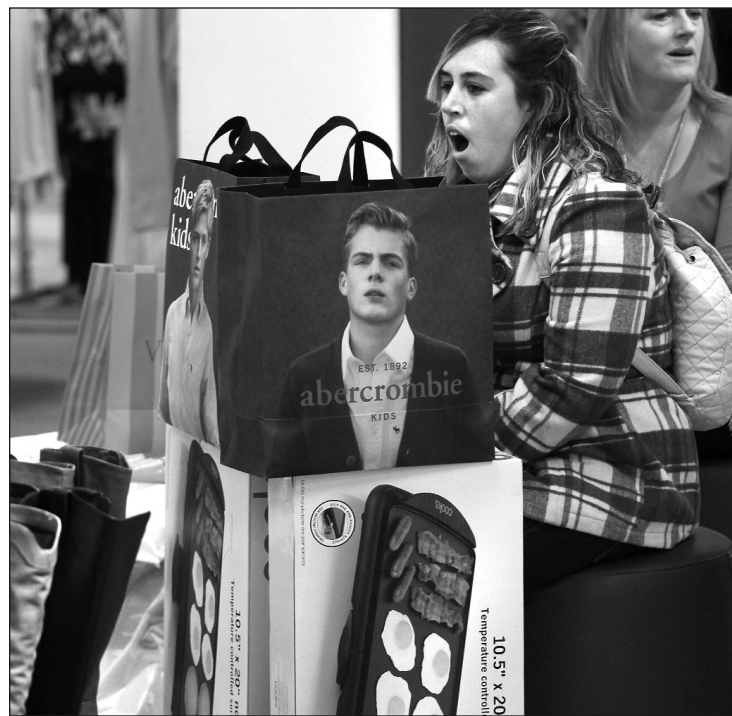
"I ate my turkey dinner and came right here," said Rasheed Ali, a college student in New York City who bought a 50-inch TV for \$349 and a sewing machine for \$50 when Target opened at 9 p.m. on Thanksgiving. "Then I'm going home and eating more."

This new approach could become a holiday shopping season tradition.

"It's Black Thursday and Friday combined," said Jackie Fernandez, a retail expert at the consulting firm Deloitte. "This is going to be a new normal of how we shop."

It won't be clear for a few days how many shoppers took advantage of the Thanksgiving hours. But about 17 percent of people said earlier this month that they planned to shop at stores that opened on Thanksgiving, according to an International Council of Shopping Centers-Goldman Sachs survey of 1,000 consumers.

Meanwhile, 33 percent intended to shop on Black Friday, down 1 percentage point from



STEVE JESSMORE/MYRTLE BEACH SUN-NEWS/MCT
Amanda Wolfe rests near the shoe department as her fellow shoppers go for door buster deals at JC Penney at the 6 a.m. opening on Black Friday, November 23, 2012 at Coastal Grand Mall in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

last year. Overall, it is estimated that sales on Black Friday will be up 3.8 percent to \$11.4 billion this year, according to technology company ShopperTrak, which did not forecast sales from Thanksgiving Day.

The Black Friday creep began in earnest a few years ago when stores realized that sales alone weren't enough to lure shoppers anymore, especially with Americans becoming more comfortable buying things online. Opening on Thanksgiving was risky, with some employees and shoppers complaining it was almost sacrilegious.

But many stores evidently felt they needed an edge, especially this season, when many Americans are worried about high unemployment and wondering whether Congress will be able to head off tax increases and spend-

ing cuts before the U.S. reaches the "fiscal cliff" in January.

Overall, the National Retail Federation estimates that sales in November and December will rise 4.1 percent this year to \$586.1 billion, below last year's 5.6 percent.

"Every retailer wants to beat everyone else," said C. Britt Beemer, chairman of America's Research Group, a firm based in Charleston, S.C. "Shoppers love it."

At Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, most of its 4,000 U.S. nameake stores are already open 24 hours year-round. But the chain added special sales at 8 p.m. on Black Friday, two hours earlier than a year ago.

The company said that its start to the holiday season was "the best ever," with nearly 10 million transactions and 5,000

items sold per second from 8 p.m. to midnight on Thanksgiving.

Toys R Us opened at 8 p.m. on Thanksgiving, an hour earlier than last year.

Macy's, which opened at midnight on Thanksgiving, had 12,000 customers wrapped around its store in New York's Herald Square.

Julie Hansen, a spokeswoman at Minneapolis' Mall of America, the nation's largest shopping center, reported that 30,000 shoppers showed up for the mall's midnight opening, up from 20,000 last year. "This was additional dollars," Hansen said. This year, 200 of the 520 mall tenants opened at midnight following Thanksgiving. That's double from a year ago.

To be sure, it's not clear whether the longer hours will turn into extra dollars for retailers, or whether sales will simply be spread out over two days.

The Thanksgiving openings appeared to create two waves of shoppers — the late-nights and the early birds.

Sam Chandler and his wife, Lori, were among the night owls. They started shopping at midnight on Thanksgiving. By the time they reached the Wal-Mart in Greenville, S.C., early Friday, they had already hit several stores, including Target and Best Buy.

"We've learned over the years, you have to stand in line early and pray," Sam said.

Stu and April Schatz of Rockland County, N.Y., went to the Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, N.J., which didn't open until 7 a.m. on Black Friday, because they didn't want to deal with the crowds that show up late on Thanksgiving night.

"It's so much more civilized going in the morning," said April Schatz, a teacher. "We wanted to enjoy our evening."

Protests Greet Shoppers At Wal-Marts Nationwide

BY SARAH SKIDMORE
AP Business Writer

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Wal-Mart workers and supporters marched in protest at a number of stores nationwide Thursday and Friday, blasting the wages, benefits and treatment of employees of the world's largest retailer.

The efforts seemed to do little to keep shoppers away, though — Wal-Mart said it was its best Black Friday ever.

In Paramount, Calif., authorities arrested a small group of protesters Friday outside a Wal-Mart. Elizabeth Brennan of Warehouse Workers United said nine people, including three Wal-Mart employees, were arrested shortly after 12 noon for blocking the street outside the store in Paramount. At one point, however, more than 1,000 people blocked traffic outside the store, Sheriff's Capt. Mike Parker told KNBC-TV.

In Lakewood, Colo., shoppers hesitated as they passed dozens of protesters outside a Wal-Mart but entered without incident. Some protesters held signs playing off of the retailing giant's cor-

porate slogan, "Live better," accusing the company of corporate greed and underpaying its workers.

"This is the way you get a fair shake. You've got to fight for it. You've always had to," said protester Charlie May, of the Industrial Workers of the World labor organization.

A union-backed group called OUR Walmart has said that it is holding an estimated 1,000 protests in 46 states. The exact number is unclear. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. has refuted that estimate, saying the figure is grossly exaggerated and that the protests involved few of its own employees.

A number of demonstrations and walk-outs occurred last week at stores but were scheduled to culminate on one of the year's busiest shopping days. The size and impact of the protests varied greatly by site. OUR Walmart, made up of current and former Wal-Mart employees, was formed in 2010 to press the company for better working conditions. Wal-Mart has criticized the group for relying largely on other unions and non-employees to make up

the ranks protesting outside its stores.

The retailer also filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board last week against the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union. The company said that the demonstrations organized by OUR Walmart threatened to disrupt its business and intimidate customers and associates.

Wal-Mart estimated that fewer than 50 associates participated in Thursday and Friday's protests nationwide. Company spokesman Dan Fogleman said that the number of associates who missed their shifts during the two days of events is 60 percent lower than last year.

"It was proven last night - and again today - that the OUR Walmart group doesn't speak for the 1.3 million Walmart associates," the company said in a statement.

The union group estimated that "hundreds" of employees participated nationwide. Victoria Martinez, 29, marched in front of the store in Paramount on Black Friday. The Wal-Mart photo department em-

ployee worked her shift on Thanksgiving but skipped work on Friday to "speak out". She said the company shows a lack of respect for employees, noting that she faced retaliation by local managers after speaking out about problems during an open discussion sponsored by the head office.

"I believe that when I started at this company, it was great," said Martinez, who's worked for Wal-Mart for seven years. "They've taken away everything that is great."

Wal-Mart for many years has faced intense scrutiny over its wage and benefit policies and treatment of its workers. Fogleman says that the company provides some of the best jobs in the retail industry and that its wages and benefits typically meet or exceed those of competitors. The retailer maintains that it has many long-term employees and that its turnover rate is below the industry average.

The company, based in Bentonville, Ark., operates 10,400 stores in 27 countries.


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