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'Deals were unbelievable' Shoppers say early morning sales worth getting up for

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Staff Photo: Su Anderson

Chris Minervino sits on the ground outside the Mall of Georgia Old Navy guarding the bags while waiting for his family as Kaden Davis, 2, of Gainesville, peeks out the window as his mom stands nearby.

LAWRENCEVILLE - Margie Hager of Lilburn got up at 3:30 Friday morning to start her Christmas shopping. She went through the sale papers on Thanksgiving and mapped out her morning route that covered an early swing through Wal-Mart, Kohl's and Garden Ridge. By 9:30 a.m., she had four new tires on the car and she'd completed her gift list by noon.

Braving the cold, early hours was worth it, she said.

"I see why people get up early," Hager said. "The deals were unbelievable. I planned on spending less this year, definitely, but I got a lot more for my money."

Gwinnett County's malls saw steady traffic throughout the day. The Mall of Georgia's parking lot was packed around dawn, while Discover Mills hosted an after lunch crowd.

Sharp discounts lured Diana Rendon of Lawrenceville to Discover Mills on Friday. She intends to spend less money on this year's Christmas shopping, too.

"Good prices and many discounts," she said in Spanish. "Fifty percent off, 20 percent off the entire store, two for one."

Brothers Michael and Matt Moran drive an hour from Toccoa every year on Black Friday to hit Gwinnett's sales. With a financially tighter Christmas ahead this year, the brothers appreciated the sales they found.

"Gas prices," Matt Moran explained.

Christmas and Hanukkah shopping started very early for about 50 people who participated in an overnight Thanksgiving camp out in the Bass Pro Shops' parking lot. About 15 people mingled around about 9 p.m. on Thanksgiving, sipping hot chocolate and heating Krispy Kreme doughnuts over fire pits.

Some outdoor enthusiasts spent the night in tents they won from the store, saying they weren't bothered by the chilly temperature.

"I can camp in zero degree weather," Winder resident Jay Apley said.

Apley, who arrived at 2 p.m. Thursday and won the first tent, said he set up an air mattress, sleeping bags and a heater to make his stay more comfortable. In an interview that evening, he said he planned to wake up at about 3:30 a.m. to get a good spot in line. He said he only planned on buying one thing - blue jeans on sale for about \$10.

