

Jan. 14, 2014

## Pearl's Outlets of Miss. off to a strong start



Shariba Wash and her daughter Shamyia, 18 months, both of Forest, enjoy an afternoon shopping excursion at the Outlets of Mississippi in Pearl on Tuesday.

Talk about perfect timing for opening a new retail development: The grand opening and Black Friday kickoff to the holiday season fell within the first two weeks of operation for the Outlets of Mississippi in Pearl.

Kathy Hacksaw, general manager of the Outlets of Mississippi, said she's heard good things from tenants about sales.

"Every single tenant says that they did better than expected," she said.

The Outlets attracted 350,000 to 360,000 visitors in November and "over half a million" in December, Hacksaw said. Few people shop by themselves at outlets; most cars carry about three people, she said.

I shopped for a few gifts at the Outlets of Mississippi on the Saturday afternoon before Christmas and found packed parking lots but no traffic hassle — despite the large numbers of shoppers coming and going and a threat of severe weather.

The Pearl Police Department keeps officers there each day to keep things moving and even the center's security and maintenance workers are trained to direct traffic in the parking lots and scout for overlooked parking places where they can direct drivers.

Pearl Mayor Brad Rogers is optimistic the filled parking lots at the \$175 million development that officially opened on Nov. 14 will translate into increased income from sales tax revenue for Pearl.

“We definitely expect a boost in sales tax revenue,” Rogers said. “I hesitate to say how much. I don’t want to count my chickens before they hatch.”

It’s still too early to know for sure as sales tax diversion information for November and December isn’t yet available.

But a check of car tags one day during the holidays turned up about 15 states and 30 counties in Mississippi, Hacksaw said. “We’ll do a ZIP code survey of customers this quarter,” she said.

Another good sign, Hacksaw said, is that sales of the Outlets of Mississippi gift card were strong. “We didn’t begin selling them until Dec. 6 and we sold over 2,000 gifts cards,” she said.

Some indication of how strong the first few weeks of sales at the center were will come this month.

Kathy Waterbury, director of communications for the Mississippi Department of Revenue, said sales tax diversion information for November 2013 will be available by the middle of this month and information for December 2013 will be available by the middle of February. A city receives 18.5 percent of the 7 percent sales tax collected inside the municipality.

Sales tax diversion figures for half of November and December will give an idea about how the holiday season went. But perhaps a six-month view, say from January until June, will provide an even more true picture.