

Get Peak Pond-season Sales Despite Winter Weather

Monday, Dec. 14, 2009, 4:50 p.m., EST

Customers ventured out in the cold to enjoy treats, festivities and shopping at Across the Pond in Florence and Huntsville, Ala. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) We just wrapped up our annual Open Houses in Florence and in Huntsville. Based on the current economy, we focused our marketing efforts to compete for the 'high street' Christmas dollar this year.

The odds were against us because: Despite the fact that December weather in Alabama usually remains temperate, and it never snows in Alabama, it snowed from dusk to dawn before our Huntsville Open House. The main bridges and overpasses were closed because of black ice. The kickoff for the Southeastern Conference (SEC) Champion between Alabama and Florida was at 3 p.m. Alabama closes down for football. We expected it would be a short day. We made our first sale at 9:50 a.m., after being open for almost two hours. The clock was ticking with only five hours left before kickoff.

Staff and shoppers were all smiles. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) I felt nervous and concerned that our Open House would fail. The sun was shining, the outdoor fireplaces were lit and the chili was cooking; and the crowds came.

When my wife Jeannie and daughter Olivia arrived at 10:15, the parking lot was full. Customers even filled our neighbor Bennet Nurseries' parking lot as well as some who parked along the highway shoulder.

At one point, cash register lines were 6 to 8 people deep. All my employees were smiling and Olivia happily greeted folks at the door.

Our sales for the day were 22.19 percent higher than last year, and last year was a pretty good year.

Open House sales in winter matched those on a typical Saturday during peak season. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) Our Open House in Florence took place the following weekend. At this smaller, conservative, working-class town on the Tennessee River, the weather provided rain, sleet and bitterly cold temperatures.

Nevertheless, the parking lot was full by 10:30 a.m. We enjoyed a consistent flow of customers, and the cash registers were ringing. Sales were almost double from last year's Florence Open House!

The total dollar amount for our stores was as good as a peak season Saturday. For me, these results were as good as that of the Alabama football game -- an amazing win.

It just goes to show what can be done with good planning and a little optimism. Let's put on our game faces and play! Don't just be in the game, but play the game.