

BIG DAY FOR SMALL BIZ

LI's mom-and-pop shops
hope to get boost from
Small Business Saturday



BY CARA S. TRAGER
Special to Newsday

Employing everything from traditional to unusual promotions, many of Long Island's mom-and-pop shops are gearing up to entice customers to shop 'til they drop on Nov. 30, the nationwide Small

Business Saturday.

But the stores' efforts, aren't only about drumming up foot traffic and logging sales gains during the all-important fourth quarter. They're also to thank customers for their support, Island business owners said.

While some are offering discounts restricted to purchases on Small Business Saturday,

others are extending their promotions through Dec. 1. Still other shops are incorporating the day into events that kick off on Black Friday and culminate on Cyber Monday — or later in December.

With small businesses having "taken a punch to the gut" in recent times, with the pandemic, supply-chain and hiring

challenges and record inflation, "Small Business Saturday is just the type of boost stores can use," Long Island Association president and CEO Matt Cohen said.

And by patronizing independent shops, Long Islanders are "helping friends and family," who often own or work in the small businesses, Cohen said.

"The more that small businesses prosper, the more all of us prosper as a region."

According to American Express, which launched Small Business Saturday in 2010 to help rejuvenate consumer spending at small businesses following the 2008-09 financial

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crisis, last year's day logged in with \$17 billion in sales — a drop from 2022's \$17.9 billion. Since its inception, the red-letter shopping day has accounted for \$201 billion in U.S. sales, based on 2023 results.

This year, in the face of inflation and rising costs, "people will be spending more but not getting more," said Ted Rossman, senior industry analyst at Bankrate. And "people will be deal conscious."

But small businesses shouldn't assume they "have to slash prices" — even though many small and large stores are doing that, said Doug Betensky, owner of Upside Business Consultants in Hauppauge.

Instead, retailers can "lure customers with a complimentary service" — as in a store employee engaging children in an on-site activity that frees their parents to shop, he said.

Plus, "with a creative merchandise approach, retailers can also avoid forsaking the bottom line for top line sales," Betensky said. As an example, by bundling a low-profit phone with a high-profit phone case, stores can create a convenient package with an overall higher profit margin.

All too often, businesses go straight for the discount and "without a strategy, leave money on the table," Betensky said.

Six small Long Island retailers discussed their marketing plans for capitalizing on Small Business Saturday with Newsday.

SVS Fine Jewelry Oceanside

This year, SVS Fine Jewelry, which bears the initials of Sami Victor Saatchi, 44, who owns



Sami and Morgan Saatchi, of SVS Fine Jewelry, will offer a snowfall-related promotion.

the business with his wife, Morgan, 43, will use refunds on unreturned items — provided Mother Nature cooperates — and diamond giveaways based on purchase amounts.

The Oceanside emporium's "Let It Snow Event" allows shoppers to keep merchandise they bought in the store between Small Business Saturday and Dec. 18 but gives them their money back for it — if SVS Fine Jewelry's storefront sidewalk gets 6 inches or more snow on Christmas, said Sami Saatchi, who employs 13 people.

As part of the snow-required promotion, customers also can opt to retain their purchase but instead of getting a refund, they can receive 20% more in store credit. Thus, if they had bought an item for \$1,000, they could keep that piece and receive \$1,200 to spend at SVS.

Meanwhile, a "Twice the Twinkle Event" offers free diamond jewelry, based on how much customers spend in-store on Small Business Saturday and Black Friday.

To that end, shoppers spending \$600 or more will receive a free pair of lab-grown diamond studs, which have a total ½-

carat weight and a retail value of \$299; \$1,250 or more, a free ½-carat total weight, lab-grown diamond pendant, with a \$750 retail value; and \$3,995 or more, a free 2-carat total weight lab-grown diamond bracelet, with a \$2,500 retail value, Saatchi said.

"If people are going to buy jewelry anyway . . . it's one more reason . . . to choose us," Saatchi said.

Let's Bag It Merrick

For Lauren Harris, the founder and owner of Let's Bag It, a 25-year-old handbag specialty shop in Merrick, Small Business Saturday promotions, which are an extension of its special deals on Black Friday, serve multiple purposes: to thank customers for their longtime support; to shine a light on the firm's new proprietary items; and to showcase its expansion into jewelry and giftware.



Lauren Harris, right, and her daughter Julien LaSalla will host an in-store 30% sale at Let's Bag It.

The entry into new merchandise categories coincided with Harris' daughter, Julien LaSalla, 29, joining the business full time as her mother's business partner, and it precipitated a \$25,000 investment in a renovation that included marble shelving and a charm bar.

"October is always our slowest month, but I'm really happy . . . because we redid the store, people were curious and were shopping here last month," said Harris, 60, noting that as of October, handbag sales were 15% ahead of the same 10-month period in 2023.

Although Harris anticipates the renovations to draw curious shoppers to the 1,000-square foot boutique, the four-employee shop — on both Saturday and Dec. 1 — will host an in-store 30% sale, not including giftware that will be 10% off.

"There'll be no discounts on special orders, select designers and prior purchases," she said. On Cyber Monday, the store will offer a 25% discount on the web and in the store but return to its everyday prices on Tuesday, with 15% and 25% discounts on \$150 and \$250 purchases, respectively.

MRO Palace Elmont

At MRO Palace, an Afrocentric men's and women's clothing and accessories shop, Small Business Saturday translates into 15% storewide savings.

Although founder Modupe Ruth Ogunlaja Armstead, 54, said Black History Month in February accounts for the boutique's strongest sales period, she plans to promote her participation in the Saturday event mostly with exterior signage

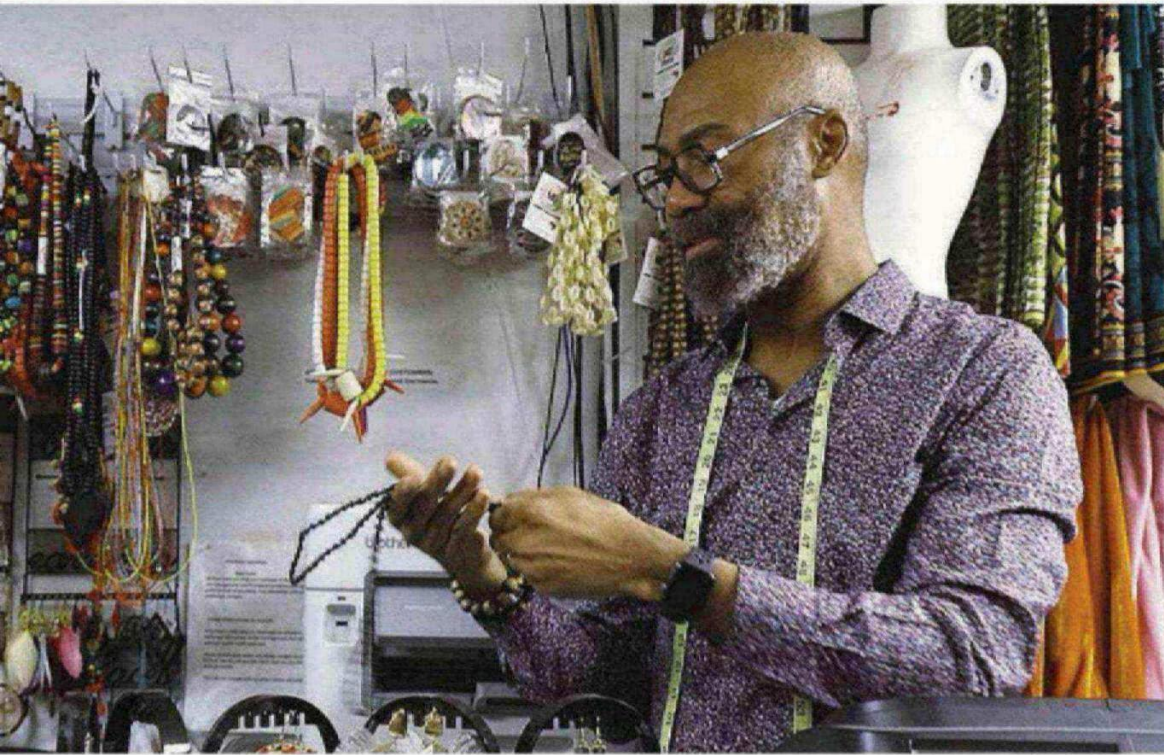


MRO Palace owners Modupe

and social media.

All MRO Palace's offerings are hand-sewn — by Armstead or tailors in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, where she also sources fabrics, some of them handwoven. Everyday prices range from \$10 for beaded waist jewelry to \$250 for an off-the-rack men's blazer. Custom items, depending on their intricacy and fabric, average \$500 but can cost as much as \$8,000 for a wedding dress.

"Depending on the weather, we normally get five or six people in the store, so maybe we'll get four more to support the business on" that Saturday, she said. The firm, which draws customers from Long Island,



Ruth Ogunlaja Armstead and husband, Don Armstead, will offer 15% storewide savings on Saturday.

the Bronx and New Jersey, experiences an annual growth rate of more than 5%, she said.

"Our business is good right now but we just need more awareness," said Armstead, who is in the midst of personally redesigning her firm's website.

Armstead immigrated to the United States in 2001. She says she holds a professional studies degree in fashion and illustration from a vocational and industrial training institute in Lagos, Nigeria, and a master's in strategic marketing and communication from Fordham University's Gabelli School of Business.

Armstead launched the boutique in 2018. Her husband, Don Armstead, joined the business two years later and handles customer service.

"I love my culture and want people to see it," Modupe Armstead said. "I believe it's my reason I'm here."

Einstein's Attic Northport, Huntington Village

Lori Badanes, the owner of Einstein's Attic, isn't messing with success: She's repeating the promotion that worked last year. Her two-unit business, which sells toys, baby clothes and gifts, has a Northport shop she purchased in 2011 and a Huntington Village location she acquired in February.

Based on the amounts customers spend in-store and on its website between Black Friday and Cyber Monday, Einstein's Attic will give them gift cards — on the Tuesday after Cyber Monday, said Badanes, a former teacher.

To that end, a \$125 outlay results in a \$25 card; \$250 in spending a \$50 card; and \$500 a \$100 card, she said.

"This gift card promo is cumulative through the weekend," Badanes, 57, said. "Gift cards are issued for future purchases, not deducted from weekend purchases, and there are no exclusions or expiration date."

Since families typically shop together on Small Business Saturday, Einstein's Attic also will enable them — once again — to pool their purchases for the largest gift card possible. "It was so much fun last year watching them come together to buy a gift with mom," Badanes said.

Her mother, Irene Brower, 82, volunteers in the two-employee business, with the firm hiring additional help as needed.

To further sweeten the store's shopping experience, Einstein's Attic will serve hot chocolate from Black Friday through Dec. 1.

Kathleen of Donegal Rockville Centre

Kathleen of Donegal, a 37-year-old Rockville Centre retailer of Irish imports, is doing more than tipping its hat to Small Business Saturday. It's also extending its storewide sales to Dec. 1.

The two-day event entails a 15% sale for a maximum discount of \$75.

The firm's plethora of Irish merchandise includes men's sports jackets, ties, sweaters and Trinity hats; and women's jackets and capes, jewelry and assorted giftware. Prices range from \$20 for a ring holder to



Shauna Ryan, left, manager of Kathleen of Donegal, will have a two-day sale starting Saturday, with a 15% discount on merchandise.

\$4,500 for a diamond and emerald claddagh pendant on a 14-karat gold chain, Shauna Ryan, the store's manager, said.

"Last year, people came in on Sunday and we saw that the sale would bring in more people who couldn't come out on Saturday," Ryan said. In 2023, the then-single-day small business event had attracted 80 shoppers — compared with 30 on an average Saturday.

Beyond serving as a sales builder, the event is the shop's way of "saying thank you to our consumers," Ryan said.

About a decade ago, the business' founder, Kathleen Alcock, 85, retired to her native Donegal, Ireland, and passed its ownership on to her son, Rockville Centre resident Patrick Alcock, who works for a carpentry company. But Kathleen Alcock is still involved in decisions regarding the six-employee business, said Ryan, who joined the business as a part-timer about nine years ago and assumed her managerial post three years later.

And with a palate-pleasing nod to its Irish ancestry, the shop will serve Irish biscuits on both sale days.

The Chocolate Duck Farmingdale

The Chocolate Duck, which sells everything from candy-making utensils and chocolate molds to cake-decorating supplies and ready-made confections, is currently promoting a 20% coupon — only redeemable on Saturday.

Since Nov. 7 on Instagram and Facebook, the Farmingdale shop has been posting the coupon, which can be used on merchandise throughout the store, except for parties and melting chocolate, according to Christine Bisbee, 54, who manages the kitchen staff and order fulfillments at her family-owned-and-

operated business. She had worked in the store during high school and, three decades ago, came aboard full-time after receiving her pastry training at the New York Restaurant School in Manhattan.

Her father, Harry Cohen, 79, who works the store's front end, had been a practicing attorney before he purchased the existing business with Bisbee's mother in 1986, at the suggestion of Bisbee's late sister. Today, the five-employee operation includes Bisbee's two nieces and it brings in more workers for the holiday season.

The Chocolate Duck's prices range from \$2 for a chocolate-covered pretzel to \$19.99 for a cake pan, Bisbee said.

"We're a very holiday-esque store, and SBS is our kickoff to everyone's holiday creations — for buying supplies and getting ready for their festivities," said Bisbee, who counts the day among The Chocolate Duck's "bread and butter days."

With a tough economy requiring people to spend more on groceries, there's less money for "other things," Bisbee said. "The small business day is very important to us."



Christina Bisbee and dad Harry Cohen, owners of The Chocolate Duck, will give 20% off coupon.



Lori Badanes, the owner of Einstein's Attic in Huntington, will give away gift cards, a promotion she says worked well last year.