



# Daily Times Herald

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**CARROLL, IOWA**

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## Bucking trends, Carroll businesses find many reasons for optimism

By

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As doom-and-gloom analysts issue seemingly moment-by-moment proclamations of economic calamity nationally, even globally, the Carroll business community in large part is turning a deaf ear to the noise.

There's a reason for that: Business overall is beating the national trends here, says Carroll Chamber of Commerce executive director Jim Gossett.

"There's not a universal increase in sales (in Carroll)," Gossett said. "Not everybody's up in sales. But by and large 2008 met or exceeded expectations particularly given the dour news in the national media."

At J.C. Penney, one of the retail anchors in the downtown business community, manager Mary Boles is upbeat about 2008 and the beginning of this year.

Her store is in the top 20 percent of sales nationally for J.C. Penney, a chain with more than 1,000 locations. Over the last year, on a month-to-month basis, the Carroll J.C. Penney has been performing 50 percent or more better than other stores in the chain's network.

Much of that is due to the community, she said.

"When the economy is tough people do have a tendency to rally around their towns," Boles said.

Gossett said there is something to that in terms of motivating customer traffic as many people clearly made the choice to shop at home.

"Gas prices came down a month before Christmas so that wasn't the reason," Gossett said.

Boles said the downtown business community rallies together in good times and bad.

"Everybody down here pulls together," Boles said. "It's not 'I'm going to get a sale at the demise of someone else.' We're all very big fans of each other."

Boles said J.C. Penney plans to maintain its presence at the current location in downtown Carroll.

"Yes, we're very happy down here," Boles said. "We do a great, great business here. This is the right place for our store."

The Carroll J.C. Penney also benefits from the relative strength of the company nationally as well, Boles added.

"I think compared to other retailers in the nation, I know that we're in a great situation," Boles said. "We're still going to be opening stores this year."

She said J.C. Penney likely would add 17 new locations in the United States.

Overall, Boles said, retailers should stick to what they do best: serving customers.

It's important to stay positive and not let the national news send you into a depressed state of mind, she said.

"It's very easy if you listen to that day after day," Boles said. "It just beats you down. I wouldn't subscribe to a daily dose of that."

Across the street, at Eckerman Jewelry, owner Mike Eckerman, says 2009 is starting out solid for his family business.

"January started out gangbusters here," Eckerman said. "There is a lot of doom and gloom out there but as you can tell by the level of my voice I'm not feeling it."

Eckerman said his store, which sells mid-priced to luxury products, has focused on the moderate-cost inventory.

"I can't tell you how thrilled I am with how that worked out for us," Eckerman said.

During the holiday season, Eckerman said, the foot traffic in his store was off, but with better follow through he was able to actually increase sales.

Not all jewelers around the nation are in such an enviable position, Eckerman said.

Other jewelers he talks with at national shows "are ready to jump out the windows of their buildings and put an end to it all."

Eckerman added, "I thank my lucky stars we're in the situation we're in."

All of this said, Gossett wants Carroll to keep things in perspective about the economy, which is facing many challenges.

"No one is going to be immune until a national recovery comes about," Gossett said.

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