



## Retail guru Robert Gibbs' advice pays off for Santa Cruz retailers

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ -- Santa Cruz merchants who took the advice of retail guru Robert Gibbs say they are seeing more traffic and higher sales.

"All those points he made were great," said Alexia Martinez, manager at Arteak, describing sales of furniture and home accessories from Southeast Asia as good.

Gibbs, who was invited by the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, recommended merchants make sure customers can see into their shops, use the color red to get attention and put three good things on sale at least 15 percent off.

Windows are critical, according to Gibbs.

"It takes eight seconds to walk past a storefront," he said. "If you go by, no one turns around to go back."

Martinez redid the window display at Arteak, which is located at 1130 Soquel Ave. on the Eastside, based on Gibbs' suggestions.

She took away furniture that had blocked the windows, added red lamps, and decorated a bed in colors of pink, red and gold to make it "eye-popping" from the street.

"Lots of people have been drawn in by that color," she said.

After she changed signs saying "30 percent off" to bright orange and red, shoppers took notice, asking, "Is that 30 percent off?"

She also set up a round pedestal table near the front to display Christmas ornaments. Almost all of them were sold.

One of Gibbs' tips was "like bringing out a magic wand," according to Teresa Zolar, manager at Annieglass at 110 Cooper St. downtown.

She placed a display of sale items front and center instead of scattering them throughout the shop, and shoppers noticed.

"It's been tremendously successful," she said. "The things that we moved to that spot, people would say, 'Is this new?'"

She moved a display case to make it easier for shoppers to see inside, and eliminated another that Gibbs felt did not fit the store's ambiance.

"Customers are saying the store looks beautiful. What's different?" she said.

Annie's new collection, the Nature Series, has been a big hit, she added. The collection features frosted glass embellished with a silver-toned tree or a gold-toned bird. A rectangular tray priced is at \$42.

"We can't keep it on the shelf," Zolar said.

Other Santa Cruz businesses are getting a boost from Think Local First Santa Cruz County and its first Shop Local Week.

"I don't know if people are just trying to take better care of themselves, or just stressed," said chiropractor Erica Schafer, who has been busier than usual.

More than 700 people pledged to shop locally, according to campaign coordinator Denise Vivar. They got a chance to win a prize package of gift certificates from locally owned businesses.

Nineteen businesses offered prizes, so many that three prize packages, each worth more than \$500, were awarded. The winners were: Dale Julin, Peggy Cobbs and Ted Lorek.

Frank Trowbridge of Palace Art & Office Supply reported sales at the Santa Cruz store "up over last year by double digits" compared to last year, and up single digits at the Capitola location.

"It is hard to say what the key driver was," he said, noting the Palace gift guide came out Dec. 2, the day the Shop Local Week started, "but the marketing push for buying local certainly was a very good thing for Palace."

Jennifer Gallacher of Santa Cruz Rehearsal Studios said "Think Local First has provided our favorite networking opportunities of 2010. We have had a great time at all of their mixers and taken advantage of the ability to have free booths at events."

She said the studio has seen a steady stream of bands practicing, including local band Wooster & The Taxi Project, which will perform at Moe's Alley on New Year's Eve.