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Buyer confidence rebounds to highest level in eight months

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Across the nation, consumer confidence has hit a peak – people are spending a little more freely these days, and some local stores are reaping the benefits.

Consumer confidence recently jumped to its highest level in eight months, surpassing experts' predictions of only a moderate rise, according to news reports.

“People are just starting to see things turn around,” said Rick Shannon, chairman of the department of marketing and sales at Western Kentucky University. “The president is pretty positive and upbeat most of the time, and people respond to what the leaders say.”

And local shoppers have been responding positively for a while. Carol McIvor, owner of Ooh La La's women's apparel shop in Bowling Green, said her business has been soaring lately.

“My business is doing wonderful. We've had a great spring,” she said.

In fact, business has remained steady throughout the recession, despite past drops in consumer confidence, she said.

“Bowling Green has not suffered ... in the league that other cities have felt the pinch,” she said. “I just think that the people in Bowling Green, we've been very fortunate here.”

Liz Bradley, owner of LuLu's Fine Home Furnishings and Consignments in Bowling Green, said she has held her breath throughout the recession. But business has been good, she said.

“We haven't had a slump,” she said. “If anything, our sales are up.”

Still, she has noticed people being more cautious and wiser with their money.

“It takes them longer to make a decision instead of just impulse buying,” she said. “People are actually considering the purchase.”

Customers kept workers busy this weekend at Coach House Gifts in Greenwood Mall, manager Barb Ross said.

“I think people are still spending,” she said. “People are still out, you know, buying gifts – not just cards. They're going over to the gifts.”

As consumer confidence rebounds, retailers can take that opportunity to promote their products; still they must provide an incentive for people to shop, Shannon said.

“The deals will still be important and people just seeing the value (of the product),” he said.

Laura Bain-Selbo of Bowling Green recently started a pottery business, selling her pieces at the farmer's

market. Business has been good so far – a sign that consumers are beginning to feel less pressured by the **economy**, she said.

As far as her spending habits, “We weren’t spending a lot before, and we’re not spending a lot now,” she said.

Similarly, Mevis Sills of Bowling Green is retired and on a fixed income, so she is always careful when spending money, no matter the economic conditions.

Still, the **economy** seems to be brightening, she said.

“We just sold our house in 42 days, and my friend just sold her house in nine days,” she said.

But a consumer confidence boost does not necessarily indicate the end of the recession, Shannon said.

“It’s a positive sign, but until you get a couple or three months (of increased confidence) in a row, it’s really not going to signal an end to it,” he said.

And confidence might soon be hurt by gas prices, which have steadily increased over the past few weeks, Shannon said.

“That’s going to take bucks out of your wallet,” he said. “That’s an extra 10 bucks you don’t have on something else.”

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