

THE VANCOUVER SUN | SPORTS: LUONGO NOT TOO OLD TO LEARN NEW TRICKS » C

FRANZ 2 & 3 BUSINESS FRANCHISE & INVESTMENT EXPO BUSINESSBC 2

MARKET: 10:50 AM | 100% | 2011 REAL ESTATE INDEX | 2011 REAL ESTATE INDEX

3 & 4 P.M. closed | Dow Jones 12,617.36 | S&P 500 1,170.61 | Nikkei 24,776.99 | Dollar closed | Gold 1,050.50 | Oil 107.95 | Natural Gas 4.88

**BRIEFINGS**

**Breakdown** **15%**

The annual report on the state of the economy in Canada is out, and it's not too good. The report shows that the economy is still in a recession, but it's starting to show signs of recovery. The report also shows that the unemployment rate is still high, and that the government's fiscal policies are still not working.



Chief David Hawksworth up to the job Christmas season at his Rosewood Hotel Georgia restaurant as consumers signal increasing confidence.

## SEASONAL | Plenty of cheer as sales rise at restaurants and retail stores

Christmas and Boxing Day busy as consumers signal increasing confidence

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**FACT CHECK**

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The first Christmas season at Hawksworth Restaurant in the Rosewood Hotel Georgia was extremely busy, chef David Hawksworth said Tuesday in an interview.

"It was busier than we projected it would be, so it's been a great base to start from. It's amazing, we're very happy," Hawksworth said. "We had lots of large bookings and lots of Christmas parties, or from out of town, it was a real mix."

The restaurant, which opened in May, was open to a full house of mostly locals on Christmas.

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BY TRACY SHERLOCK  
VANCOUVER SUN

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Day at the restaurant."

At Best Buy, the season was at least as good as last year, if not better, communications manager Danielle Jung said in an interview.

"Christmas overall — the month of December — was really strong. Sales were really healthy and our traffic was really strong," Jung said.

At London Drugs, business through December was slightly stronger than last December, while Boxing Day was "dramatically stronger," said Wynne Powell, president and CEO of the Richmond-based chain of stores.

"Boxing Day was encouraging from a sales perspective," Powell said. "The Canadian economy has strength, but people have been lacking confidence to spend money."

"Companies like ourselves have benefited because the consumer drifts to brands that they trust during those times. That was very evident on Boxing Day."

These reports agree with the most up-to-date sales figures available, which are from credit and debit card payment processor Moneris, and show consumer spending up 4.64 per cent in Canada between

Nov. 25 and Dec. 16, compared to the same period last year. B.C. and New Brunswick saw the smallest increases in the country, at just 2.41 and 2.36 per cent. The Retail Council of Canada predicted that overall holiday shopping sales will increase by three per cent this year compared to last.

These figures belie the most recent Conference Board of Canada's consumer confidence index, which dropped 6.5 points from November to 69.9, and is down 11.1 points from where it stood in December 2010.

However, another statistic might explain the discrepancy: the overall number of transactions is up six per cent, while the average purchase amount is down 1.3 per cent, Moneris said.

"This indicates that Canadians are seeking deals offered by retailers, and purchasing lower-priced items more frequently," Moneris said in a news release.

Those looking for deals who didn't get what they wanted on Boxing Day shouldn't be discouraged, Jung said. "There are lots of deals still to be had — some are going on all week. We were replenishing all day

yesterday, and we're still going strong," she said. "Take a look online and you can still get a really good deal."

Powell said sales of some goods, such as high-end small appliances like espresso makers, or notebook computers, were up in double digits.

Boxing Day was extremely busy at Best Buy, with an average of 500 people lining up at each store to grab the door-crasher specials.

"Some people just like to experience Boxing Day. There is still an appetite for people to stay in line, to wait, to get into the store and get exactly what they want," Jung said, adding that online sales are also up.

The most recent IBM benchmark snapshot shows that online sales on Dec. 25 grew by 16.4 per cent over Christmas Day last year. And more people were shopping using their smartphones or tablets to snap up deals, with 18.3 per cent of all online shopping sessions initiated from some kind of mobile device.

Overall, mobile traffic increased more than 100 per cent from Christmas Day last year, with the iPad used for seven per cent of all online shopping. Sales from mobile

devices increased more than 170 per cent from last year.

"There are people who prefer to shop online and get it shipped to their house and be done, and there are the people who prefer to go early in the morning, line up and be part of the excitement," Jung said.

Price reductions at London Drugs continue through this week.

"This is a very important week for us, as it is for all retailers," Powell said. "This will be a very busy week."

Hawksworth is also set to be busy for the rest of the holidays, and they're already planning ahead for the slower season in January and February.

"We're doing Dine Out Vancouver so we're expecting the phones to go ballistic in another few days," Hawksworth said. "I've done it at another restaurant, so I know what I'm in for, but I expect it to be more ferocious here."

Dine Out Vancouver is Jan. 20 to Feb. 5; three-course meals are offered at selected restaurants for very reasonable prices.

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