

STYLE

# People line up at this Twin Cities women's store on the day after Christmas

After-Christmas sale really means everything goes.

By John Ewoldt (<http://www.startribune.com/john-ewoldt/10644811/>) Star Tribune |

DECEMBER 23, 2016 — 8:51PM

Retailers appeal to shoppers with discounts throughout the holiday season, but [Judith McGrann & Friends](http://www.judithmcgrannandfriends.com/) (<http://www.judithmcgrannandfriends.com/>) in St. Louis Park has a different strategy: no discounts before Christmas and 50 percent off starting the day after.

Every jacket, blouse, sweater and necklace, well, everything gets its price cut. Nothing is held back.

Judith McGrann and her daughter Meghan advertise the sale only via e-mail. But when the doors open at 10 a.m. each Dec. 26, about 100 customers are usually in line, depending on weather conditions.

"People line up along Excelsior Boulevard," said Judith McGrann, 74, who has been operating the store for 35 years. "It's an event that some of our customers plan their life around."

Kristen McDougall and her daughter were scoping out the full-priced merchandise Wednesday in anticipation of the sale. "I'm not a big shopper. This is the only store that can get me out to shop on the day after Christmas," said the Minneapolis resident.

"I don't know of any other clothing retailer that does it like that," said Beth Perro Jarvis of Ginger retail consulting in Minneapolis. "Banana Republic might have a 50-percent-off sale, but they don't tell you in advance. Nordstrom may not have many sales but they always have clearance racks."

The McGranns say the most amazing thing about the sale is its civility. "By the end of the day the store looks like a bomb went off, but no one's pushing, shoving or hoarding merchandise," said Judith.

The McGranns write their own rules. The store is closed on weekday evenings and Sundays. They refresh the entire inventory every six weeks. And besides the after-Christmas event, they have only one other sale, in June.

Mark Saliterman, an accountant who works with the McGranns and other small businesses, describes his client as "old-fashioned geniuses at marketing and buying."

"They go on an enormous number of buying trips every year to keep the store fresh," he said. "You can go in every week and find something different."

The 50-percent-off blowout lasts about two weeks. Whatever doesn't sell is donated to charities. "We choose ones that help women and kids," Judith said. "We don't give to thrift shops or surplus stores anymore because we don't want the recipients to have to pay for anything."

On a mid-January weekend after the store closes on Saturday, carpets are cleaned and walls are painted new shades of colors as bright as Popsicles. Then they restock with all-new spring and resort wear for winter-weary customers. "By that time in January, people need a shot of fresh, happy and colorful," said Meghan, 45.



([http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows\\_1482544551698](http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1482544551698))  
CARLOS GONZALEZ, STAR TRIBUNE

Judith McGrann and daughter Meghan are owners of the clothing boutique Judith McGrann & Friends in St. Louis Park.

The McGranns are known for injecting a lot of color and texture in their buying, Perro Jarvis said. "If women wear something with a lot of color that's noticeable, they shop more because they can't wear it every week," she said.

The concept works because the store's merchandise changes and sells quickly. New items are put out daily, but the merchandisers move everything around often. Just as the fast-fashion styles of Zara and H & M cycle in and out in six weeks or less, so it goes at Judith McGrann. But the mentality is different. McGrann's quality and prices are higher.

### **Small quantities, bigger sizes**

"We buy in small quantities to keep it special," said Meghan. "Minneapolis and St. Paul aren't big communities. When women buy something, they don't want to see someone else wearing it."

The pair goes on nearly 20 buying trips every year instead of letting sales reps bring them bestsellers that every store buys. They group complementary items from different vendors to avoid predictability on the sales floor.

Courtney Cushing Kiernat of Minneapolis calls the store her provocateur. "They push me to my funky side," she said. "I might spend more money there, but I don't mind because it won't go out of style. I can wear it for a long time."

Cushing Kiernat doesn't like to shop for clothes but is drawn to the store's Cheers-like vibe. "They remember my name, what I've bought before, and when I bring in my mom they turn down the music because they know she has a hearing problem. It feels like a community."

The McGranns know that many of their customers don't like to shop. Part of it is because people lead very busy lives that don't allow a lot of time to shop, but it's also because women don't often like what they see in the dressing room mirror. "We hear women not saying a lot of nice things about themselves," said Meghan.

They put a "kindness matters" sign just outside the dressing room.

"The employees have a way of making you feel special," said Elaine Levy of St. Louis Park. "You don't feel judged if you show up without makeup or a fancy purse."

The lack of judgment affects sizing, too. The store's size range skews larger than most boutiques. "We feel the size 0s, 2s and 4s can shop at a lot of places," said Meghan. "Fours to 14s are our sweet spot, but we cater a lot more to size 14 and 16 than 0 and 2."

The McGranns have long resisted their accountant's advice to add locations or franchises. "We'd rather have one thing and do it well," said Meghan. "We haven't focused on our website because online feels so transactional. It takes away the specialness."

The two say they aren't motivated by profit, although they've had record sales years since 2010.

"We want to make a decent salary, but other things are just as important," said Meghan. "We're closed evenings and Sundays because we want to have lives outside work and for our employees to have that, too."

---

jewoldt@startribune.com 612-673-7633