

Seasonal business means everything to owner of pool and Christmas shop

What does a pool shop owner do in the fall when temperatures – instead of people – start taking a dive?

That was the question Caryl Halstead faced in 1987 when the summer rush ended and most of the customers at her store, Caryl's Pool Shop, shut down their backyard pools for the season. She had employees on the payroll and needed a way to keep them busy over the winter months.

"It's hard to get good people on staff and then say, 'See you in March,'" she says.

The answer came to her as she watched Christmas shoppers jam the nearby parking lot at Toys"R"Us. The next fall, Halstead took the plunge into a second seasonal business: Caryl's Christmas Shop.

Today, operating two businesses is second nature for Halstead. She runs Caryl's Pool Shop from March 1 through September 30 and then opens Caryl's Christmas Shop through February. When the dual operation first started on High Point Road, 90 percent of Halstead's business was sales at the pool shop, which performs repairs, installs liners, tests water and sells supplies.

Since Halstead moved the shops to 1715 Battleground Avenue in 1990, Christmas shop sales have increased. "Now it's getting pretty close to 50-50," says Halstead.

So how do customers know if Caryl's Pool Shop has become Caryl's Christmas Shop? Easy. They just watch for the blue "pool shop"

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sign outside to disappear and the red "Christmas shop" sign to slide into its place – and vice versa in the spring.

Halstead notes that the two shops attract different clienteles. Pool customers who stop by during the winter – when Halstead provides pool repairs and supplies as needed – are amazed by the transformation.

"They'll say, 'I can't believe it's the same place,'" Halstead says.

Transforming the pool shop into a holiday store requires a year-round effort. Even when it's blazing hot and the store is full of pool supplies, it's Christmas in the back room and warehouses as Halstead and other workers receive, price, label and store holiday items.

Each January, Halstead shops for unusual holiday items and then creates themed trees – which customers can purchase, already decorated. This year, look for a Country French-themed tree and a garden-themed tree – along with a four-foot stone angel.

In addition to selling Christmas items, Halstead and Chester Zuber, her main artistic designer, also do holiday decorating for businesses, homes and organizations. Last year's clients included the Greensboro Historical Museum and the Parade of Homes.

Halstead recently joined GMA after one of her pool customers, Jay



Caryl Halstead's shop changes with the seasons, from pool supplies to Christmas.

Wenberg of Jefferson Pilot, passed along membership information. She is interested in attending networking events as well as classes offered through GMA as soon as her busy summer pool season is over. She be-

lieves that being a member of GMA will help her business.

"I think it gives you a reputation as a store that has integrity," she says. "I know I like it when I see that a business I visit is a member."

Sales-tax-free weekend requires retailer preparation

North Carolina will observe a sales-tax-free weekend August 6-8, and GMA retailers are urged to be ready for the expected surge in customers.

As a service to retailers, the N.C. Retail Merchants Association (NCRMA) has prepared a list of non-taxable items grouped by category. Exempt goods within price guidelines include clothing, sports and recreational equipment, school supplies and computers. Listed items are exempt from state as well as local sales and use taxes.

NCRMA also lists specific items of clothing, computer equipment and protective sports gear that are subject to sales taxes.

This will be North Carolina's third sales-tax-free weekend.

Detailed information on the sales tax holiday is available from the N.C. Department of Revenue. The toll-free number is 877-252-3052.

NCRMA members can receive copies of posters outlining the tax holiday guidelines by calling 800-662-7211.

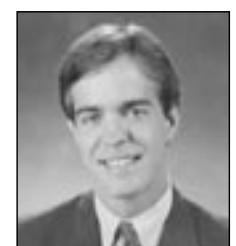
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