

DOW JONES AVERAGE


61.91

UP TO 12,169.65

CRUDE OIL


\$0.86

TO \$99.53 A BARREL

JOB NEWS HELPS LIFT MARKETS

Encouraging economic reports pushed stocks higher yesterday. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 61 points, its third gain in a row.

The number of people applying for jobless benefits dropped last week — the third week in a row — to the lowest level since April 2008, the latest sign the job market is healing. The Conference Board also reported its measure of future economic activity had a big increase last month. It was the second straight gain, signaling the economy was picking up speed.

"Today, Main Street is what matters, because Main Street makes up 71 percent of the economy," said Quincy Crosby, chief market strategist for Prudential Securities. "You can't argue with the fact that the cost of gas has come down, which puts more money in the pockets of consumers to spend, and so things are starting to tick up."

The government lowered its estimate of economic growth in the July-September quarter to an annual rate of 1.8 percent from 2 percent. That was still the fastest growth this year.

The Dow rose 61.91 points, or 0.51 percent, to 12,169.65. It has risen 409 points in three days. The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 10.28 points, or 0.83 percent, to 1,254.00. The Nasdaq closed up 21.48 points, or 0.83 percent, at 2,599.45. — AP

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Buyers wait, and budget

■ **Small retailers** expect flat sales for the holiday

■ **Online buying** siphons business from some stores

BY KEIKO MORRIS
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As Long Island's local retailers take stock in the final week of the holiday season, many are finding, in the words of Marilyn Schulman, owner of Willy Nilly Trading Co. in Bay Shore, that "flat is the new up."

Since Thanksgiving weekend — which big retail chains dominated with their long hours and heavily advertised specials — local merchants have experienced a steady increase in shopping traffic, leading to a bustling final week, they said.

Still, consumers remain on a budget, and sales are generally flat. Small, local specialty shops also face increased Internet competition, and, in some cases, manufacturers who now sell direct to the customer online and in offline brick-and-mortar stores.

Today and tomorrow will bring the procrastinators — mostly men, who tend to make appearances the day before Valentine's Day and Mother's Day and on Christmas Eve.

"We see them every year," said Alison Flodin, co-owner of Silica Inc., a Sayville boutique selling handcrafted jewelry.

The late surge of shoppers is welcome. "This week is just unbelievable, and we are getting really wiped out of merchandise," said Willy Nilly's Schulman. "If it weren't for the lines [brands] that went to the Internet, we would have been up 8 percent, but I will be happy if we come out even."

The new normal consists of



Jamie Levine and Sydney Spilko, both 14, try on scarves at Linda's G2G in Port Washington.

Some bestsellers

- **Red stone drop earrings** at Seaford's Mimixx. The earrings were featured in December's O! magazine.
- **Fingerless gloves with fur trim** at Linda's G2G.
- **Brighton jewelry** at Babylon's Roomors.
- **Snoozies slippers** at the Willy Nilly Trading Co. in Bay Shore.
- **Beach-glass sun catchers** at Sayville's Silica



smaller purchases, but often more of them. One customer at Roomors in Babylon Village purchased 10 gifts, all under \$20, said store owner Pat Turner.

Amira Garbus, co-owner of Huntington Business Products Centre, said her sales have re-

mained flat over the last few years.

"Four years ago they [customers] may have bought a \$300 pen, now they spend \$75 dollars on a pen," said Garbus, whose executive pens are her best-selling items. "They have less disposable income now."

Fuel oil dips below \$4 with warm weather

BY TOM INCANTALUPO
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Home heating oil fell below \$4 a gallon on Long Island this week for the first time since late October as warm weather curtailed demand and the European debt crisis depressed crude oil prices.

The fuel that most Nassau and Suffolk residents, and many businesses, use for heat averaged \$3.992 a gallon Monday in the latest survey of full-service dealers by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. The average was \$4.053 a week earlier, and it has been as high as \$4.12 recent-

ly — on Nov. 14.

However, the latest Long Island average price is almost 59 cents a gallon higher than a year ago, so it will still be an expensive season for heating.

Kevin Rooney, chief executive of the Oil Heat Institute of Long Island, representing fuel retailers, said weak demand

from Europe and warm weather in the Northeast have eroded prices. "It was a very, very warm November, there was a little cold weather in early December and now it's abnormally warm again," he said.

Daytime temperatures in the low to mid-40s are forecast through Monday.

Smaller retailers say they can compete by showcasing their distinct merchandise selection and customer service. "People are watching what they are spending," said Leslie Eichen, co-owner of Seaford's Mimixx, which has been doing a strong business selling designer-inspired accessories. "But people do want to be trendy, and they want to look like they have the designer look."

Linda's G2G has done brisk business with hats, scarves and gloves as well as more luxurious items like cashmere sweaters, said Melissa Ostrove, a buyer for the Port Washington boutique.

"We price things fairly, and we buy lines with a twist," she said. "And our customer service is key. We'll pick up gifts, wrap them and drop them off at the house."