Men go to mall, not necessarily to shop
They're keeping others company, among other things
By Lindsay Downey
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They weave briskly through lanes of strolling shoppers. They hover awkwardly near dressing rooms. But many of them just sit and wait.

Inside Coastland Center in Naples on a Sunday afternoon two weeks before Christmas, Cyril Gibbons, 78, of Naples, sat on a bench next to a shopping bag while his wife looked for gifts.

"She does all the shopping," Gibbons said. "I just come along and sit with the box."

Gibbons was not alone. Nearby, one man read a paperback, another sipped Starbucks coffee and a third wore headphones while he waited.

Plenty of men are on top of their shopping game and brave the crowds well in advance of the holidays. But on a typical day in a Southwest Florida mall, those elusive creatures can be difficult to find.

Cele Otnes and Mary Ann McGrath, marketing professors at the University of Illinois and Loyola University of Chicago, respectively, identified what they called the "Grab and Go" as the No. 1 stereotype in a 2001 study of male shoppers.

While some men employ it, the "Grab and Go" actually isn't as prevalent as people may think, according to Otnes and McGrath. The researchers found more instances in which men searched, browsed and bargain-hunted during their shopping trips.

Naples resident Jason Tyinski, 36, researches and plans his holiday purchases in advance.

"I'm the kind who goes in, knows what I want and gets out," Tyinski said as he sat on a bench with his 8-month-old daughter, Saylor, and waited while his wife perused the stores.

Though he planned to complete his shopping in the next four days, Tyinski said he was not looking forward to his retail excursion.

"I don't enjoy it. Not at all," he said of Christmas shopping.

A 2004 study by U.K.-based Lands' End Direct Merchants found nearly half of men surveyed - 48 percent - said Christmas shopping was more stressful than being dumped by their girlfriend, losing their job or moving back in with their parents.

It sounds extreme, but some Southwest Florida men might agree.

Mark Reed, 49, of Golden Gate, said shopping is "a pain" and he waits until Christmas Eve to head to the stores.
"The last-minute power shop," he said with a smirk, though he did bring his sons to Coastland on this day so they could pick out new sneakers for Christmas.

At Royal Fine Jewelers, Avis Butt, 45, sat behind a counter filled with gold, silver and stainless steel jewelry. The retailer said this holiday season has been slow so far, and he expected men to be among his last holiday customers.

"Usually, they come right before Christmas," he said.

According to the National Retail Federation's shop.org, more than 70 million people were expected to buy gifts online on "Cyber Monday" - the Monday following Black Friday during which online retailers offer big sales.

Approximately 56.5 percent of men were expected to shop online from work on Cyber Monday, and 71.8 percent of those ages 25 to 34 were projected to do so.

Inside J.C. Penney, Naples resident Rick Brooks, 58, studied a shelf filled with slow-cookers with his 16-year-old son, Ricky. Brooks said he sometimes shops online, but he didn't this year. He always completes his shopping before Christmas Eve, though.

"You have to or everything gets picked over," he said.

And for those who don't know what to buy friends and family, sales associates are there to help. At Perfume Collection, Maria Carranza stood behind a counter near walls filled with endless boxes of fragrances.

Men often ask Carranza for suggestions on what to buy the women in their lives during the holidays.

"Most of them run in here last minute and they say 'Give me the best name brand you have,'" Carranza said. "They don't realize girls have different tastes."

Carranza helps them decide, but many ask for gift receipts, just in case.

"They don't want to make a mistake because for that person, it's going to be something nice," the sales associate said.

When asked what he planned to buy his wife this year, Ron Savage, 55 - who lives in Ontario and spends a few weeks a year at his condo in Naples - said he didn't know.

"She hasn't told me yet," he said as he relaxed on a chair in the mall.