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Is it over yet? Retailers here to restock as recession retreats

BY SUSAN DICKENSON

SO, ARE THE MARCH REPORTS true? Are retail sales experiencing a "surge?" Are things finally turning around?

That's the question we asked of buyers on the street this week in High Point, and the answers were mostly positive. Some said they're still doing more looking than buying, but most are here to shop. As they reflected on what appears to be the beginning of the turnaround, the retailers and designers interviewed also shared their thoughts on what they're looking for, and finding, in showrooms.

IS BUSINESS IMPROVING? Absolutely! My clients' stock portfolios are doing better — it's freed up their funds... and there's pent-up demand. There's confidence that the worst has passed. I'm a designer, and I've been coming to High Point twice a year for about 20 years. I'm looking for things on behalf of clients, traditional primarily. I'm also looking for outdoor furniture in good price points but I've only seen about four outdoor vendors here. — Anne Marie Carr, Old Morrison House, Newport News, Va.



Anne Marie Carr



Ron Werner and Jim Hering

WE OPERATE FOUR STORES, and every one is up, mainly driven by our contract division. We held our annual warehouse sale in February, and sales were up 20% — I would have taken 10%. There is definitely an improvement. The world is clearly getting better, but that doesn't mean that it's better yet. We are moving upwards but it's not linear. — Ron Werner and Jim Hering, HW Home, Boulder, Colo.

HAVE I SEEN A SURGE IN SALES? Yes! I'm down to just two sofas and am open to buy. I am so excited because for the longest time all we could sell was accessories. Now people are saying 'I'm ready for a party. I haven't done

anything in years. Come do my house — and I need it done in two weeks.' It's just cleaned out my showroom. One thing that's happening out where we are is more young people are looking for the good quality — the under-30 group. And the people I'm hiring now are fantastic — the work ethic is there, the quality is great. I've been coming to the High Point Market for 37 years. I think those in the industry who have managed to tread water and get through this period — the strongest have survived. And if they're not in the boat they were in, they've surfaced in another one. I'm loving it. There are fewer people, but it's all the diehards

continued on page 4

Parties & Happenings start on p. 61



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