

# Money grows on Christmas trees

By Carley Thornell | Sunday, October 18, 2009 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Local Coverage

Even if you're not ready for Christmas Muzak before Halloween, you should have visions of holiday savings running through your head this autumn, experts say.

And some big companies are offering encouragement for frugal consumers. For example, the Sears/Kmart Christmas Club card savings promotion offers a 3 percent match for those who contribute funds to the card either in-store or online through Nov. 14.

"It's pretty well-documented that Americans are saving more than they have in recent years and that savings is bleeding over into the holiday-spending conversation," said Tom Aiello, vice president of public relations for Sears Holdings. He noted the idea was inspired by customer feedback.

The card can be used on anything, in conjunction with all sales and promotions, including drastic Black Friday discounts, Aiello said.

The Bertucci's restaurant chain is also helping people save some dough with its annual gift-card comp, which rolls out at the end of this month. For every \$25 you purchase in gift cards, you get an extra \$5 certificate. And there's nothing to stop pizza fans from buying gift cards during the promotion period to save on their own meals, said Maria Feicht, senior vice president of marketing.

Potrait Simple, which has seven New England mall locations, is offering a 25 percent discount on holiday greeting card orders placed this month.

"It's art that's created for you, for your whole family, so in a sense it's one-stop shopping," said owner Jeff Rawson.

Tom Winmill, a portfolio manager for Midas Funds, says the gift that keeps on giving is - well, the gift that keeps on giving: money. He suggests taking that \$100 you might spend on a sweater and instead investing it for the recipient.

"It's kind of like giving someone a magazine subscription," Winmill said. "You get that Cosmo every month and you think, 'Gee, Grandma loves me.' You see your statement and you think Grandma and Grandpa are great."

His personal shopping philosophy? Buy presents throughout the year, making them more special because shopping isn't rushed during the holiday season. And because time is money, shopping when convenient - rather than blitz-spending in December - is a good financial philosophy.

Although father of four Michael Mullen admits to being a "Christmas Eve shopper," his investment strategy is also centered on advance planning. The Tremont Street Credit Union vice president of brand administration opened a Christmas Club account this year, joining others who have renewed interest in plans that automatically set aside a certain dollar amount from each depositor's paycheck.

"It tends to be one of our most popular accounts," Mullen said. "I think it's a little bit more popular (this year). It's a painless way to save for the holidays. But across the board, we're also seeing a little bit of an uptick in membership and renewed interest in credit unions and traditional ways of saving."

Christmas Club members can access their accounts in mid-October. When they use that money to buy presents in cash, gift-givers also save on credit card fees, Mullen noted.

