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Article published Wednesday, November 9, 2005

Analysts bemoan coming loss of Marshall Field's Toledo area to lose choices at high end

By **JON CHAVEZ**
BLADE BUSINESS WRITER

Area consumers who enjoy shopping at Marshall Field's at Westfield Franklin Park will have one last Christmas season to do so.

The retailer's new owner, Federated Department Stores, of Cincinnati, plans to convert the store to a Macy's late next summer and reopen Sept. 1.

Macy's, which operated four area stores from 1981 to 1985 before selling them to the Elder-Beerman chain, is a venerable department store name familiar to most people as the sponsor of the famous Thanksgiving Day parade in New York.

But retail analysts said that, despite Macy's fame, Toledo-area shoppers might be none too pleased that a high-end retailer like Marshall Field's is being displaced.

In terms of merchandise offerings and service, experts said, Macy's is much like Dillard's and Elder-Beerman, two chains well established in the area but lower on the scale of merchandise quality than Marshall Field's.



The downtown store was one of four Macy's in the Toledo area from 1981 to 1985. (THE BLADE)

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The Westfield Franklin Park Marshall Field's is one of 62 nationwide that will be converted to Macy's.

"You could never be second-guessed by giving something in a Marshall Field's box," said George Rosenbaum, chief executive at Leo J. Shapiro & Associates, a retail consulting firm in Chicago.

But that "treasure-like

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will notice differences in details, he said.

Marshall Field's typically has merchandise that other department stores have, he explained, "but also anything precious, expensive, and special, you could also find that at Marshall Field's."

Candace Corlette, retail analyst and principal with WSL Strategic Retail in New York, said Macy's has some smart private label lines, but little else distinguishes it from other department stores.

"Marshall Field's is a culture," she said. "It's a community culture, a community aspiration. Macy's on 34th street is an icon in New York City, but Macy's suburban is just another department store."

Analyst George Whalin, head of Retail Management Consultants, of San Carlos, Calif., said shoppers will notice how each store chain's private-label merchandise is different.

Federated became owner of Marshall Field's on Aug. 30 when it completed an \$11 billion acquisition of the May Department Stores Co., of St. Louis.

Shortly afterward, Federated said it would convert all 62 of its Marshall Field's, including the one at Franklin Park, into Macy's.

Federated wants a national brand, Mr. Whalin said, to compete with discounters like Target and Wal-Mart.

However, that strategy doesn't allow for much differentiation between stores.

Ms. Corlette said Macy's, like many of its competitors, has overcrowded sales floors and little merchandising innovation.

"There's no benefit to the shoppers in the loss of Marshall Field's," she said. "This is a stockholder advantage, not a shopper advantage."

Macy's will not make you feel like you traded up."

Contact Jon Chavez at:jchavez@theblade.com or 419-724-6128.

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