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Shoppers to line up at Pottery Barn doors

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If football is to men what shopping is to women, then this weekend is the Super Bowl for Omaha women.



Such Pottery Barn items as a heart-shaped rug and a decorative throw and pillow figure in Omahan Laurie McAloon's apartment decor. She is eager to shop for more at the chain's Omaha store.

Like tailgaters salivating over brats and burgers, these women have tasted this moment for years.

On Friday, Omaha gets its Pottery Barn.

"I don't remember as much talk about a store opening as this," said Laurie McAloon, 42, of Omaha. "I belong to a women's group. It's been mentioned several times: 'When is it opening? We need to go!'"

Women from Lincoln and Grand Island are going, too.

Finally, they can feel the chenille and touch the drapes they have pined for in the Pottery Barn catalog. They can try out the leather chairs. They won't need to pay shipping charges, and they won't have to drive all the way to Kansas City, Mo., the closest city to Omaha with the store.

Pottery Barn started in 1949 as a single store in Lower Manhattan and has grown into a nationwide company with 165 brick-and-mortar stores, an Internet store, a

catalog and spin-off companies such as Pottery Barn Kids. That store, which sells children's home furnishings, also opens Friday in Omaha's Regency Court.

Pottery Barn's classic but comfy styles have made it a trendsetter in America's home decor. Products range from a vintage-style brushed nickel towel ring for \$19 to an early 20th-century farmhouse-style armoire for \$1,099.

Shoppers often refer to Pottery Barn catalogs as "magazines" and use them to guide their decorating. Four episodes of the TV sitcom "Friends" featured the store. And it frequently appears as a description in real estate ads - "this Pottery Barn house is a must-see!"

Pottery Barn

Opens Friday at Omaha's Regency Court, along with a Pottery Barn Kids and an Ann Taylor Loft - the first of all three in Omaha. Also opening are the city's second Williams-Sonoma store, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Scooters Java and the Linen Gallery.

Started in 1949 as a single store in Lower Manhattan. Now has 165 stores nationwide and 72 Pottery Barn Kids stores.

Its parent company,

While Nebraskans are excited about Pottery Barn products, there's more to their enthusiasm. They are celebrating that more "big-city" stores like it might make it here.

"It's almost an anointing of a town, when the town migrates from being a little town to a big city," said Leigh Oshirak, a Pottery Barn spokeswoman.

The Omaha opening marks the first Pottery Barn in Nebraska and leaves only six states without Pottery Barn stores. Iowa is one of them, but it will get its first in August 2004 in West Des Moines.

Pottery Barn hasn't had an opening with this much hoopla in quite some time, Oshirak said.

"We received phone calls 10 months out on just how excited people were," she said.

A 25-year-old Omaha marketing specialist has waited nine months to buy a Pottery Barn entertainment center so she could avoid shipping fees. One Omaha professional loves the store so much that she took a part-time job there so she could receive the employee discount. And a Grand Island stay-at-home mom plans a trip to check it out before Christmas.

"I think my husband will be excited, too," said the woman, 38-year-old Lisa Albers.

Becky Moncur, 28, a stay-at-home mom from Lincoln, is making the trip this weekend and is especially excited about Pottery Barn Kids.

She and her sister, Karen Pinkall of Omaha, have talked about the opening for months. Pinkall, 30, a bank service manager, has shopped at Pottery Barns in Dallas, Houston and Chicago, as well as through the catalog. Now she can get instant gratification.

"You can take it home today instead of waiting seven to 10 days," she said.

Nickola Peterson, 35, an Omaha pilates instructor, has longed for a Pottery Barn since she left St. Louis more than three years ago. Since then, she has eyed a Pottery Barn rolltop desk and a table. They would complement the Pottery Barn items she already has, of course.

"I have a leather couch. I have their trunks and a wicker woven chair and a rug," she said. "I needed something to put my telephone on, and it has to be a perfect size. And they have the perfect one!"

Williams-Sonoma Inc., reported in August that its fiscal second-quarter profit climbed 26 percent from a year ago. "Pottery Barn has been at the center of growth for the company," said Leigh Oshirak, San Francisco-based company spokeswoman.

Most popular items: the Charleston sofa, an overstuffed couch; the Manhattan chair, a leather chair in the classic club style; retro telephones; Sausalito dishware, a hand-painted line of plates, bowls and other pieces.