Greetings,

This holiday season finds businesses pensive about the close of 2009 and the forecast for 2010. We've highlighted some of the bright spots in this month's newsletter with stories about retail trends, local growth and news from the municipalities. Check out the Business Spotlight and the municipal updates for some unique gift-giving ideas and seasonal activities for kids big and small.

To learn more about the resources mentioned in this newsletter or to become involved in EDAB activities, please visit the Harford County Office of Economic Development website at [www.harfordbusiness.org/](http://www.harfordbusiness.org/).

Warm wishes for a happy holiday,

Eric McLauchlin
Chairman, EDAB

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**BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:**

**Tiddlywinks**

If you're looking for that hard-to-find, one-of-a-kind toy or child's gift, try Tiddlywinks Toys at 17 N. Main Street in Bel Air. This specialty store offers "toys, books, parties and more," according to owner Kim Norris, who opened the store in March 2009. A mother of two, Norris realized both the importance of play in learning and the difficulty of finding unique toys locally. Knowing the family demographics of Harford County, she saw her opportunity to create a store that featured specialty merchandise at competitive prices, without the shipping costs of on-line or catalog retailers. An added bonus: the store provides a children's play area for kids while parents shop.

Tiddlywinks also offers interactive classes for parents and children, as well as birthday parties. The weekly Tots & Dots for toddlers and pre-schoolers emphasizes gross motor skills and learning through games and play. A baby sign language class will be added in January. Kids' birthday parties are custom-designed for the birthday child based on four themes: Classic, Beading, Lego or Princess.

According to Norris, despite opening in a down economy, business is better than anticipated. Events and parties have supported the retail business, and word-of-mouth has been their best advertising.

Children can visit with Santa at Tiddlywinks on December 19. [http://www.tiddlywinkstoys.com/](http://www.tiddlywinkstoys.com/)

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**RINGING UP RETAIL**

You are no doubt forecasting your 2010 sales while keeping your fingers crossed for this holiday season.

National retail analysts are conservative about short-term retail trends. According to an early November interview with Dana Telsey, CEO of Telsey Advisory Group, on PBS' *Nightly Business Report*, holiday sales are expected to be "flat with a slight upward bias." She noted in the interview that the industry is seeing improving trends in luxury goods.

A trends study by the National Retail Federation found that candy and food spending is up about $10 per person, and that gift cards were the most asked-for gifts this season. According to the NRF, the economy is still the biggest influencing factor on where and how people shop, and sales and promotions will be the deciding factor on purchases. In addition, the Internet will influence one in three holiday purchases. Smart retailers are not only selling on-line, they are marketing on-line.

Locally we can see retail bright spots. The renovated Harford Mall has a full roster of tenants, from department stores to specialty retailers in a safe, clean and convenient environment. New retail establishments are demonstrating confidence in the Harford County area by coming here and contributing to the positive growth that will boost all sectors of our local economy. For example, the recent groundbreaking for the 700,000 square-foot Boulevard at Box Hill will be anchored by a 144,000 square-foot Wegman's market. In downtown Bel Air, shops are differentiating themselves with upscale goods and services and boutique offerings. Retailers are participating in the revitalization projects supported by the town and getting exposure to new customers. In Havre de Grace, new restaurants are opening, as well as new retail art galleries. Combined with the city's other attractions, the strong retail development outlook will make it a destination point for shoppers.

These shoppers are already here and will continue to arrive. We can confidently anticipate business from the people who have filled the 1,700 new BRAC positions this year and the 4,000 more arriving in 2010. These new residents will seek shopping venues similar to those from which they came - primarily New Jersey and Virginia. They will demand healthy malls and upscale as well as discount shopping.

Harford County offers both. By using national trend reports and the guaranteed local growth factor, your business can plan to be profitable in the new year.
MUNICIPALITIES READY FOR SEASON

The Harford County municipalities are “wrapping up” the year with seasonal activities and reports of business results.

Town of Bel Air

In 2009, the Town completed a comprehensive Market Study of the municipality’s residential mix and three main commercial areas: historic downtown, the Route 1 area and the Route 24 corridor. The Town also completed its 2009-2015 Comprehensive Plan, setting the six-year vision for land use, historic preservation, stormwater management and economic development. The town’s demographics in public and private sectors remained steady with a slight increase in household population from the 2000 Census and a 1% decline in licensed businesses in 2009 compared to 2008, using third quarter statistics. With the BRAC initiative, the Town anticipates an increase in commercial and residential permit activity in 2010. Several new events were initiated this year by the Town’s Cultural Arts Commission and the Economic & Community Development Commission. They included “Restaurant Week” and the “Town of Bel Air Film Festival” at the Bel Air Reckord Armory, featuring international films, celebrity guests and a student film festival event. The Downtown Alliance sponsored the ongoing successes: The Chocolate Festival and the Maryland State BBQ Bash. The annual Christmas Parade was recently held, and visitors and guests can enjoy a variety show at the Armory entitled “A Hometown Christmas,” through December 12.

Town of Havre de Grace

Havre de Grace’s eclectic atmosphere is booming with new restaurants and retail art galleries, making it a destination for shoppers and tourists alike. The town’s newest restaurant is the Vineyard Wine Bar, which emphasizes enjoying spectacular wines at very affordable prices. Their retail shop features an assortment of over 300 wines from around the world. Local Wine Clubs are making the Vineyard Wine Bar their meeting place for holiday parties and tastings. The Vineyard Wine Bar occupies an historic 1838 building, which was renovated and preserved by the property owner in partnership with the Vineyard Wine Bar. The renovation was made possible in part through a Small Business Administration (SBA) Loan and State façade grant money through Havre de Grace Main Street and the City of Havre de Grace. http://www.thevineyardwinebar.com/ For the holidays, participating downtown businesses in Havre de Grace will be open until 8pm on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays for local shopping and personal, one of a kind gifts. Visit Santa for FREE on Thursdays Fridays and Saturday from 5-8pm at 317 St. John Street, where Mrs. Clause has decorated Santa’s Shop for picture-perfect memories! http://www.mainstreethdg.com/