

BACK TO SCHOOL

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Trends for school shoppers

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM
Special to the Record-Eagle

At this time of the year, parents and students start pounding the pavement and visiting stores, checking out special sales and promotions, and surfing the Internet, all in the quest of finding out what's cool for going back to school.

Dominating style trends for the 2003-04 school season are the western, "Old World" and athletic looks.

The western look is comprised of denim in every style and color, accented with suede, leather and turquoise, accessorized with vests, hats and boots.

The "Old World" trend is reflected in ruffles on shirts for girls, suede shorts and pants, scalloped, lace collars and fleece jackets embroidered with flowers.

The athletic look continues to be a perennial favorite and this year colorful rugby and varsity shirts and hooded sweatshirts with striped sleeve are popular with both girls and boys.

In terms of accessories, the backpack is a must for nearly everyone. This year, look for plusher models, with wider straps that provide more comfort and help carry heavy loads, as well as more compartments and organizer features.

For younger students, wheeled backpacks, most of which have the images of pop stars or cartoon charac-

ters, are also selling well.

Messenger bags, which have been a must for urbanites in cities like Manhattan and Seattle, are also replacing standard backpacks for many students. They're trendy, but tend to be less sturdy than their counterparts, so watch out for thin straps carrying big loads.

Detachable and denim lunch bags and stretchy fabric book covers made their debut in school supply stores last year and were a hit. The trend continues this year and these items can be found anywhere that sells school or office supplies, as well as national chain stores.

Zipper-pull and Carabiner Watches are tiny digital timekeepers that double as zipper pulls and carabiners, and sell for under \$10. They're considered an easy way to keep track of time without having to wear a watch.

Amanda Olds, assistant manager at Old Navy at Horizon Outlet in Traverse City said that near the end of July, she noticed a change in the focus of shoppers.

"It's been getting busier every day in terms of back to school shopping," said Olds. "People have moved past the summer items except to buy clearance merchandise, and are really concentrating on getting ready for the school year."

Olds said that at Old Navy, some of the top sellers in terms of new merchandise have been in navy and white-colored items, particularly for those who attend private schools where there is a dress code as well as anything in denim, including pants, shirts, coats hats and caps. Shirts with long and three-quarter length sleeves, sweatshirts with the Old Navy logo or other catchphrases, and sweaters have all been in demand. The store also carries an array of accessories for school, home and dorm room, such as lunch boxes, oversized backpacks, waste baskets, clocks and CD cases.

In downtown Traverse

City, Spirals, a new store geared toward young people opened in mid-June. Owner Sarah Surratt says her concept of a "resale shop in a boutique atmosphere" seems to have caught on and generated good word-of-mouth among a growing clientele, many of whom are coming specifically to see what they can find for the new school year.

"We're different because here, you can bring in your old clothes and trade them in for new, or even trade them in for cash," said Surratt. "So far, people have been just loving it, because you have some real options for things you don't want in your wardrobe, as opposed to just throwing them out, giving them away or letting them take up space."

Judging by the sales at Spirals, Surratt said that casual wear is still the preferred fashion style, especially jeans, but that colors have replaced black in most items of clothing. Spirals has a wide variety of "lightly used" couture, from vintage to current, lightly used, much of it with desirable brand names like American Eagle, Gap, Old Navy, Abercrombie & Fitch, and the like. Most of the merchandise, whether it's prom dresses or purses, shirts or slacks, is priced at under \$20.

"People think they're in Disneyland, because they can load up on the brand names they love and get them at one-third the cost," said Surratt. "Some of the most popular items for our store are all those specific labels that kids love, and they can carry out a stuffed bag for about \$80 or \$90. We have other styles, like the vintage wear that goes quickly, but just like the brand names, we keep everything very affordable because we rely on locals for our business to work."

Surratt adds that if customers bring in items that the store eventually does not accept, they will take them and add them to a group that they take to a



Record-Eagle/Meegan R. Reid

Top, US Polo for Men line at J.C. Penney in Traverse City. Above, Sarah Surratt stands among the racks of clothes in her new resale shop, Spirals, in Traverse City. Surratt co-owns the shop with Junior Saluta.

local charitable thrift store once a month. "We'll be glad to handle that donation aspect if someone wants," she said, "and we give them to different stores. It's just another way you can feel good about doing something with clothing that no longer works for you."

And the Grand Traverse Mall is teaming with stores

and sponsors to create "The Scene" Sunday, August 10. This event is aimed at teens shopping for back-to-school. There will be live music, a runway fashion show from 1-5 p.m., prizes and of course, sales. "The Scene" runs from 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.



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Trendy shoes by Splash Fashion Footwear at Charlotte Russe at Traverse City's Grand Traverse Mall.

Back To School

DOWN OUTLET
3172 AUCLE Across from The GT Resort
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Benton Spring Sweater

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Jester Bunting

All-a-flutter Hat

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