

Last-minute gift giving tips

Still haven't finished Christmas shopping? You're not alone.

A study released last year by the National Retail Federation found the average consumer had completed 81 percent of his or her shopping as of the Sunday before the holiday.

"Procrastination is an annual holiday tradition for

many of today's busy shoppers," said Curt Andrews, senior vice president for Blockbuster, whose own retail study showed that about one in five people won't finish their holiday shopping until the week before Christmas or even on Christmas Eve. "Last-minute shoppers should focus their efforts on gift solutions that are sure to please and are easy to come by."

Here are some tips from Blockbuster for last-minute shopping success: Take

advantage of extended hours. Shop when it's convenient for you or when crowds are thin, such as midweek or during the late evening.

■ Shop at the retailer where you can find something for almost everyone on your list. More than half of those surveyed said they would be more likely to shop at one location that can satisfy all their gift needs.

Whether it's gourmet foods or home entertainment, there's probably a store that can answer a shopper's gift

needs, Andrews said.

■ Look for pre-packaged gifts. Ready-made gift bags and baskets make great last-minute gifts for an assistant, neighbor, the babysitter or anyone else to whom you want to spread a little cheer.

■ Look for in-store packaging to reduce wrapping time.

■ Many online retailers have last-minute gift ideas.

■ Consider gift cards. Once considered the "lazy man's gift," gift cards have soared in popularity with both gift givers and receivers, said the

National Retail Federation. Last year, 74.3 percent of consumers purchased a gift card during the holidays, up from 69.9 percent the previous year. (CNS)

Guilty gifts

Gifts that shouldn't have been given — or received — on Christmas day: coral jewelry, beluga caviar, crocodile skin and snakeskin products.

Why? The World Wildlife Fund, a nature protection

group, says they're among items whose commercial exploitation is endangering animals and plant species already threatened by extinction.

Other items on the list include tiger products (often used in traditional Asian medicine or as souvenirs and good luck charms), ivory in any form, turtle shell products and shahtoosh scarves woven from the hair of Tibetan antelopes. (CNS)

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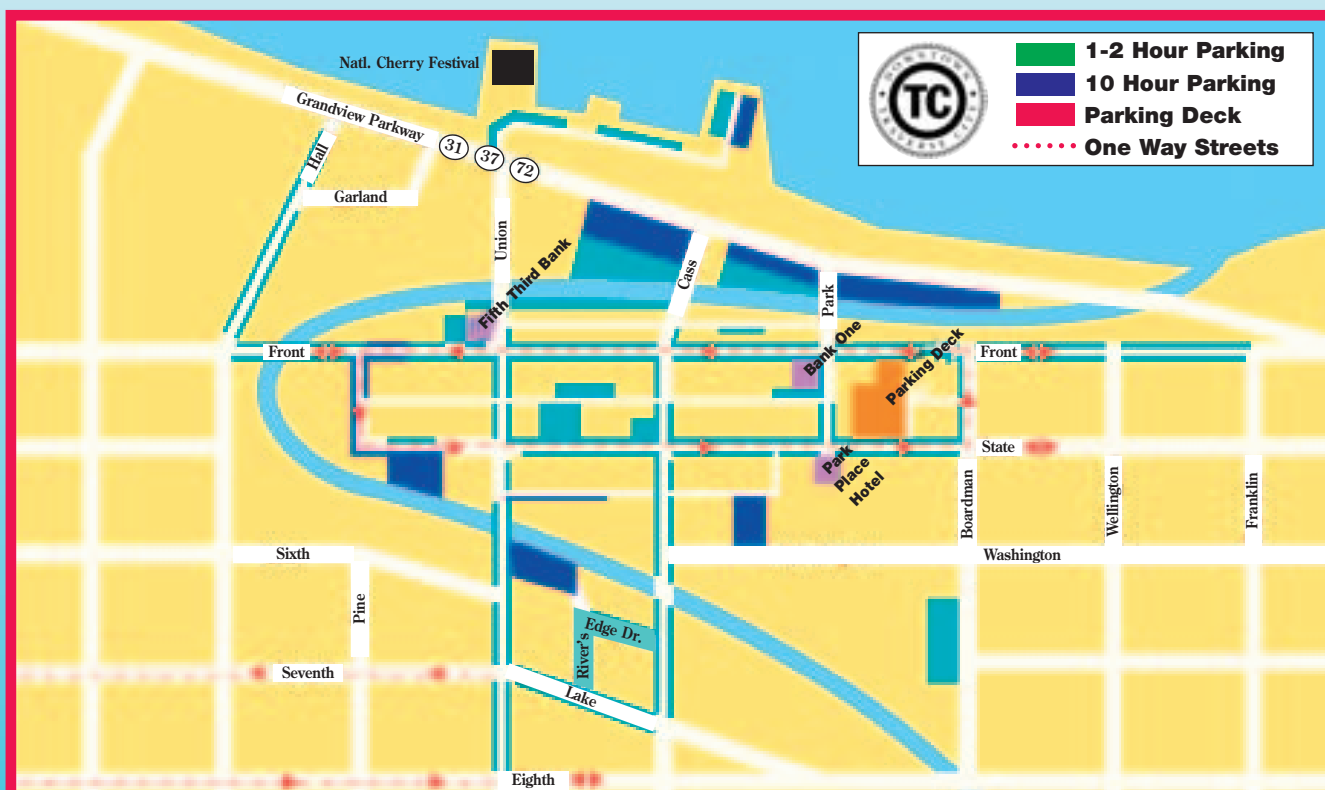
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