



Research Brief

The Commonwealth's Official Source for Population and Economic Statistics

December 15, 2005

The 2005 Holiday Season

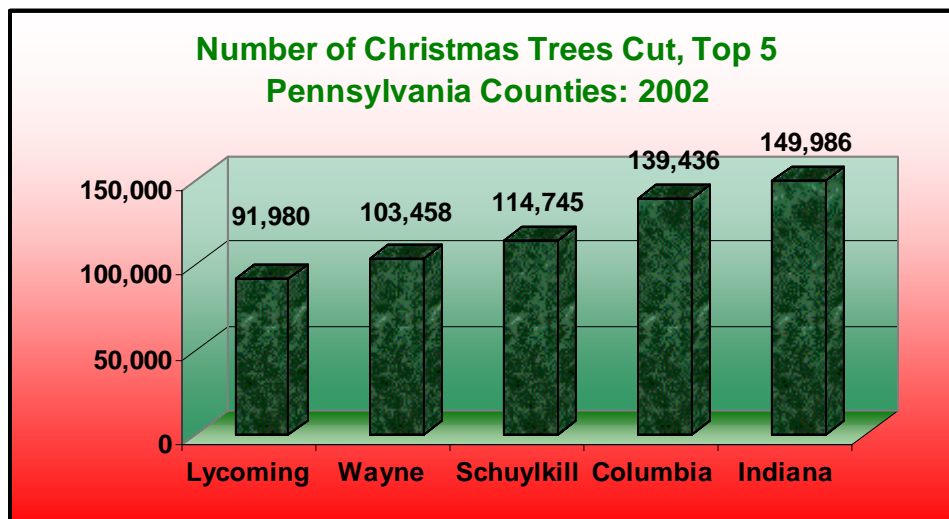
MIDDLETOWN, Pa – The holiday season, with its many traditions, family gatherings, and good feelings, is almost here. In celebration of the season, the Pennsylvania State Data Center presents the following holiday facts and figures.

The North Pole in Pennsylvania?

Santa Claus is a familiar figure that we associate with the holidays, but what about Belsnickel? According to Pennsylvania Dutch tradition, Belsnickel was a bearded character dressed in rags, masks, furs, or discarded clothing who traveled the countryside in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Belsnickel likely evolved from earlier Germanic folk traditions that produced characters like Ru Claus, Joseph Claus, Black Peter, and Krampus. Some have argued that Belsnickel, rather than Saint Nicholas, was the inspiration for Santa Claus, but unlike Santa, Belsnickel was as likely to smack an ill-behaved child as he was to hand out treats to the good children.ⁱ

Christmas Trees and Holiday Flora

Christmas Trees are no small part of the commonwealth's economy. Pennsylvania led the nation in the number of Christmas tree farms with 2,164 in 2002. The commonwealth ranked fourth in acres devoted to Christmas tree production (44,905), Oregon topped the list with 67,804 acres. Oregon and Pennsylvania also ranked first (6,466,551) and fourth (1,724,419) in the number of trees harvested in 2002. Berks County was home to the most Christmas tree farms in Pennsylvania (114), while Schuylkill had the largest acreage (4,064) devoted to



Christmas tree cultivation. By far, the most Christmas trees were cut in Indiana County (149,896). Christmas tree sales in Pennsylvania grossed \$13.9 million in 2003.

The Christmas tree's smaller counterpart, the poinsettia, is also a significant part of the economy. There were 140 poinsettia producers in Pennsylvania in 2004, far more than the next closest state, New York (104). The commonwealth ranked sixth in the nation in both production of potted poinsettias (3.7 million) and value of sales (at wholesale- \$13.5 million) in 2004. Purchase your poinsettia at one of the 1,110 florist businesses located in Pennsylvania. These shops generated \$319 million in sales in 2002.

Religion and the Holidays

Many holiday celebrations are inspired by religious observances. In a study of religious groupings in Pennsylvania in 2000, 7.1 million people reported membership in one of the participating churches. The largest group of adherents were Catholic (3,802,524), followed by members of the United Methodist Church (659,350) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (611,913). Since 1990, membership has declined by 174,001 among the churches that participated in the study.

Religious Bodies With More Than 100,000 Adherents, Pennsylvania: 2000		
Religious Bodies	Congregations	Adherents
Catholic Church	1,624	3,802,524
The United Methodist Church	2,442	659,350
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	1,343	611,913
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	1,083	324,714
Jewish Estimate	197	283,000
United Church of Christ	735	241,844
American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.	435	132,858
Episcopal Church	413	116,511

Source: American Religion Data Archive, Pennsylvania Religious Affiliations: 2000

Holiday Travel

Worried about holiday traffic? Maybe you should think ahead to the summer. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Christmas and New Year's Day ranked at the bottom of the big seven holidays in order of the most highly traveled holidays and holiday (7-day) periods in 2003. Independence Day was the most highly traveled 7-day period (8,482,930), while Labor Day had the highest traffic volume for a single-day holiday (1,443,579). There's no doubt that traffic is getting heavier, however. Traffic volume increased by 214,234 over 2002 during the 2003 Christmas holiday period, and by 188,695 during the 2003 New Year's holiday period.

Holiday Shopping –The Retail Boost

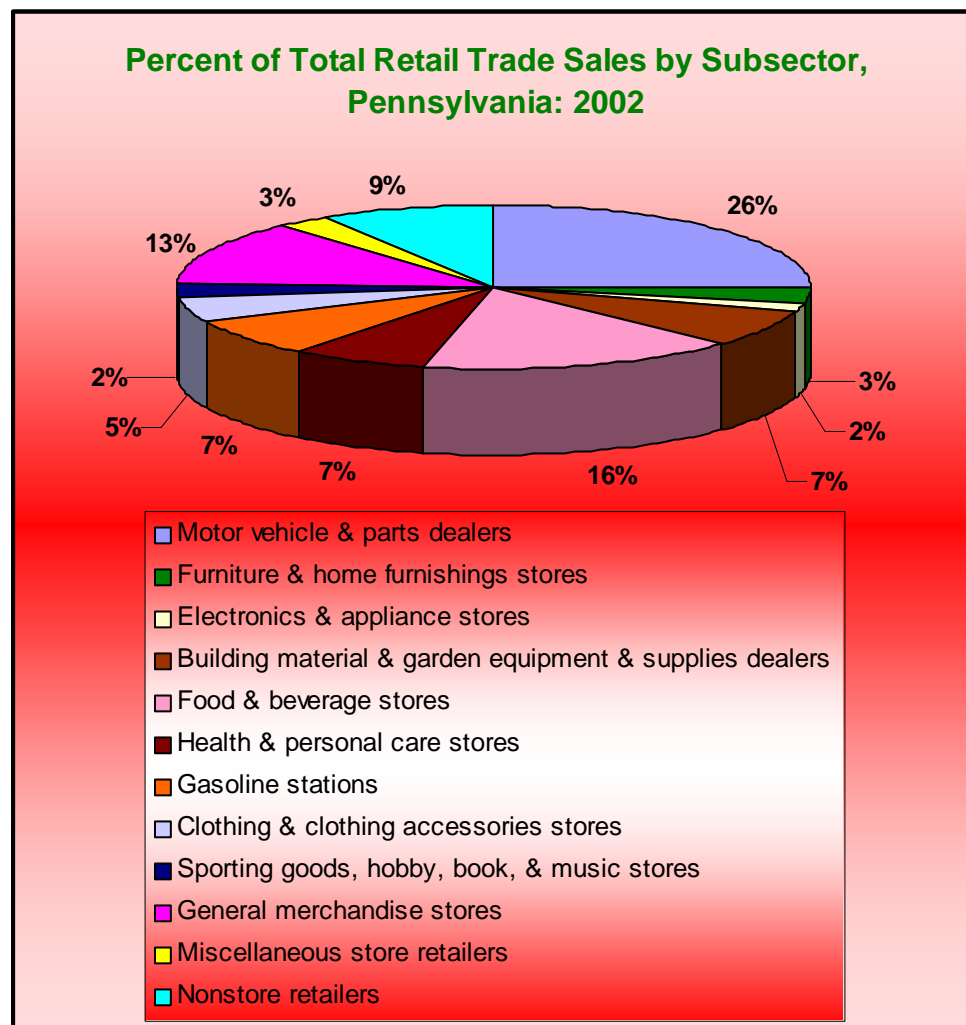
It is well known that the holiday season is a critical time for retailers. In December of 2004, the nation's department stores took in an estimated \$31.9 billion in sales, a 54 percent increase over the previous month. In Pennsylvania, the economic impact of the holiday season can also be measured in temporary job increases. Between October and December of 2004 employment in the retail sector in the commonwealth increased by 29,500, to 697,800, and by more than 8,500 to 73,300 in department stores alone.

Searching for that Perfect Gift

Pennsylvanians have a number of locations to find that perfect gift for their loved ones. In 2002, there were more than 48,000 retail establishments located in the commonwealth employing 661,993 people and generating \$130.7 billion in sales. Looking for something for the kids? Pennsylvania consumers had 473 hobby, toy, and

game stores to choose from in 2002. These stores employed 6,883 people and generated \$810 million in sales. Prefer clothing, shoes, or jewelry? The 6,276 establishments that sold these items employed 61,185 people and took in \$6.7 billion in sales. Electronics and appliances, also popular gifts, could be found at 1,897 businesses throughout the commonwealth in 2002. They generated \$2.8 billion in sales and employed 14,913 people. Sporting goods are also popular gifts, and could be found at 940 stores employing 7,596 people and accounting for almost \$1 billion in sales. Bookstores and music stores accounted for more than 914 businesses, employed 8,801, and also took in \$1 billion in sales. Traditionally, department stores have been the biggest winners during the holidays. Pennsylvanians had 500 department stores to choose from in 2002. They employed 70,616 people and generated \$10.2 billion in sales.

Rather stay home and shop? The growth of e-commerce is a significant shift in the way people purchase gifts for the holidays. Nationally, the census bureau reports that e-commerce sales in the fourth quarter of last year grew to \$21.5 billion, up 24 percent from the fourth quarter of 2003, though still just 2.3 percent of total retail sales for the period. In Pennsylvania, 596 establishments were e-shopping or mail order businesses in 2002. These businesses employed 17,064 people and generated \$8.2 billion in sales.



Sources: ¹ Landis Valley Museum, http://www.landisvalleymuseum.org/info_belsnickel.htm
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture 2002, Floriculture Crops 2004 Summary
American Religion Data Archive, Pennsylvania Religious Affiliations 2000
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, 2003 Pennsylvania Traffic Data
U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics
U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Economic Census

The Pennsylvania State Data Center is the commonwealth's official source for population and economic statistics. It is based at Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs. The Pennsylvania State Data Center is part of the U.S. Census Bureau's National State Data Center Program.

Editors: For additional data, contact the Pennsylvania State Data Center's State Capital Office at 717.772.2710 or for faculty comment on this topic, contact Penn State Harrisburg's Public Information Office at 717.948.6029.