



<http://www.nationaljeweler.com/independents/retail-surveys/Weekend-storm-slows--1965.shtml>

Weekend Report

By Brecken Branstrator and Michelle Graff

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New York--The winter storm dubbed Dion has been making its way across the country since late last week, dumping a mix of snow and ice on a number of states and interfering with any shopping that wasn't taking place online.

Retailers in some parts of the country tell *National Jeweler* that the storm disrupted what otherwise, they hoped, would have been a busy pre-holiday weekend.

Those without weather-related issues, however, say sales continued to be strong. Diamonds are doing well this holiday season, with more than one retailer reporting success with De Beers' branded stone, the Forevermark.

National Jeweler publishes a weekly holiday sales roundup every Monday throughout the holiday season. The roundups encompass interviews with

independent retailers in five regions: the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, South Central and West.

Read on for a brief report from each region.

SOUTH CENTRAL

Certain areas of the South Central United States felt the impact of the giant winter storm known as Dion over the weekend, a storm that brought a combination of snow, sleet and freezing rain to parts of the country ill-equipped to deal with such conditions and kept many shoppers indoors over the weekend.

Stanley Jewelers Gemologist in North Little Rock, Ark. was among those impacted, says Laura Stanley.

Dion dumped an inch-and-a-half of ice on North Little Rock beginning Thursday night and continuing through Friday morning. All store employees, save the jeweler who has a four-wheel drive vehicle, were unable to reach the shop Friday and Saturday, as were customers.

It was very quiet for a holiday weekend; they received only three messages on their answering machine during that entire span.

"This is the first time we've lost a weekend this close to Christmas so I don't know what we are going to do exactly," Stanley says.

She says she's hopeful customers trapped inside over the weekend will just shift their shopping to this coming week, though she worries she might have lost business to the Internet. "That's a concern. I was bored and I was on the computer. Why wouldn't they be?" she asks.

Susan Eisen's eponymous shop in El Paso, Texas was not in the path of the storm, and she says she had a steady weekend of sales, though she noticed one interesting trend.

Due to discounts being offered at nearby discount stores, including an outlet mall containing a major jewelry retailer, customers are asking for engagement rings priced at \$3,000 or less.

Eisen says she takes time to explain to the customers about why those rings are priced the way they are and the differences among diamond grading reports from various laboratories, as well as the added value of expertise her shop brings.

“When they come in with those prices, I am like, ‘What?’” she says. “I have to explain to each customer about pricing and quality.”

Outside of the customers asking for lower-cost engagement rings, Eisen says her customers continue to show interest in Forevermark, the diamond brand from De Beers. “Forevermark diamonds are great. They diamonds are beautiful and customers really are interested in the story,” she says.

--Senior Editor Hannah Connorton contributed to this report.