

Let your fingers do your Christmas shopping

By ERIC JUDE
Copley News Service

Catalog shopping can make the joyous season more enjoyable. There are no crowded subways, traffic jams, long lines to wait in or tired feet - only the convenience of your telephone or the nearest mailbox.

From llamas to leather goods; cashews to cuff links, modern catalogs enable American consumers to purchase items from the sublime to the ridiculous with ease and speed.

"When I buy by mail, I gather catalogs together for quick and easy shopping in the relaxed environment of my home," says consumer expert Deborah Durham. "I avoid the department store crowds. And it's simple to

coordinate accessories from one catalog with sportswear from another. It eliminates running from store to store and guessing if my wardrobe is going to work."

Durham is hardly alone in her appreciation of mail order. Studies show that the mail-order business represents the fastest growing segment of retail sales in the country. Americans purchase nearly \$60 billion worth of consumer merchandise from catalogs each year and \$15 billion on Christmas purchases via catalog.

Catalog customers also prefer the advantage of receiving new goods that haven't been handled in a store and being able to choose from a full stock and wide range of colors. And who doesn't enjoy receiving packages in the mail?

But before diving into the catalog shopping game wallet, it's important to know how to

choose the right catalogs, according to Durham. "When I shop by mail, I look for catalogs with products of integrity; the ones that are backed by an established company..." she says.

"With the onslaught of new mail-order firms, consumers need to be well-informed about the important features which comprise a good catalog," says Lew Frankfort, president of Coach Leatherware. "We encourage consumers to carefully review catalogs to ensure quick, smart purchases which fulfill their needs and expectations."

Durham uses Coach Leatherware's catalog as an example of what consumers should look for when considering a new mail-order source:

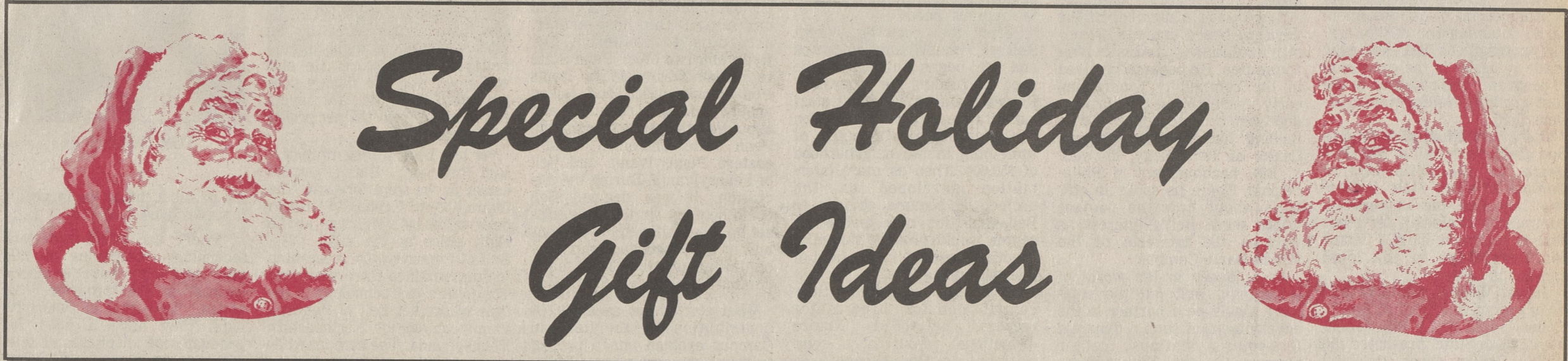
- Satisfaction guaranteed and returns automatically accepted.
- A 24-hour toll-free telephone number to be

- available for orders.
- Products that are clearly visible and accompanied by a full description.
- No hidden postage and handling costs.
- Products well-wrapped to ensure arrival in factory-fresh condition.
- Acceptance of several forms of payment to suit the shopper's needs.

Processing time to ensure the product will be shipped quickly, with rush delivery available.

When you're catalog shopping this year, you might want to check out these mail-order catalogs. Like Coach Leatherware, many companies have zeroed in on their own area of the market, providing a unique boutique by mail.

- Vermont Country Store: Pick up the Vermont Country Store's fall catalog and you'll feel like you're shopping in a country store.



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