



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Best Buy employer hustles past a wall of HD TVs as he helps ready the store for Saturday's grand opening.

# Best Buy: Hip, geeky and helpful

## Soquel store is 941st for electronics retailer

By **JONDI GUMZ**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Step into the 30,000-square-foot Best Buy store on 41st Avenue, and someone in a royal blue polo shirt is likely to offer to help you.

The geeky new warehouse store, which hosts a grand opening at 9 a.m. today, has 90 employees, including nine trained in every department to assist customers.

"Everybody has a walkie that they carry," explained Liz Beeson, 26, the customer assistance supervisor, so they can hail a co-worker from one area to another.

Eight employees are "Geek Squad" agents with technical expertise. They install memory or software on your computer in the store and will make house calls.

"What makes us different is we care about our customers — we never want to leave them alone," said Beeson, who joined Best Buy eight months ago. "I love coming to work."

Based in Minnesota, Best Buy is America's largest specialty retailer of consumer electronics. The company opened six stores this week to operate a total of 941 outlets.

It started in 1966 as an audio shop called Sound of Music. In 1983, the company adopted its current name and superstore format with discounts on name brands, paving the way for expansion.

This year, Best Buy ranked No. 66 on the Fortune 500, its revenues of \$35.9 billion edging Disney and FedEx.

Lower-than-expected sales growth in January prompted the company to cut its profit outlook although it forecasts \$40 billion in sales.

The Soquel store seems young and hip with several managers in their 20s.

Mobile manager Cris Lopez, 25, of Brentwood was recruited back to Best Buy from the mortgage industry. He had started with Best Buy at 18 and became a manager by 22 overseeing 120 employees. Training helps people move up the ladder, he said, explaining how the company flew him to different locations to learn over the past two months.

The big-box store aims to appeal to socially responsible and green-minded Santa Cruzans who tend to look askance at corporate chains.

Today, general manager Jeff Garcia will present a check for \$10,000 to the Capitola Public Safety Foundation.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Best Buy opens today.

### Best Buy

**WHAT:** Electronics retailer hosts grand opening today at 9 a.m.

**HOURS:** Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

**WHERE:** 2650 41st Ave., Soquel, between Safeway and Home Depot.

**INFORMATION:** 465-0956.

Buy would match the prices of competitors. Getting a yes answer, he said, "You're one up on Circuit City."

Elizabeth Ignizio of Santa Cruz was impressed.

"The TV-DVD selection is fantastic, and the service is friendly," she said.

Contact Jondi Gumz at 706-3253 or [jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com](mailto:jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com).

### Three buys

Mobile manager Cris Lopez suggests these three buys:

**INEXPENSIVE LAPTOP:** Toshiba, \$499.99. Weighs 4-5 pounds. 160 gigabyte hard drive.

**AIRCARD:** \$30, or free with a laptop, and \$59.99 month service charge.

**CELL PHONE:** AT&T Samsung Blackjack, \$69.99 (no need for mail-in rebate).

That's not all. Employees use both sides of the paper for copies and recycle their bottles and cans, said Nic Amanno, 28, the customer experience manager.

Amanno wants to volunteer employees to help at beach cleanups and organize regular e-waste recycling events for the community.

He pointed out the store has automatic systems to turn lights and air conditioning off at night. If there are multiple models of the same televisions, employees will turn some off to save electricity, he said.

Some customers Friday had quibbles but others welcomed the new arrival.

A Soquel man eyeing GPS equipment said he expected the store to be larger (the Blossom Hill store in San Jose is 55,000 square feet) and Aptos retiree Rob Hanson said he couldn't hear the outdoor speakers he looked at.

Santa Cruz resident Carlos Ybarra walked in with his wife and two daughters to ask if Best