

Belk celebrates grand reopening

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SENECA — While many outside Belk in Applewood Plaza before the store's grand reopening were hoping they would be the one to receive a \$500 gift card among the cards store manager Chip Forester was distributing Friday morning, Kit Soccio had something else on her mind.



Belk Seneca store manager Chip Forester presents a \$5,000 check for GHS Hospice of the Foothills in Seneca to Allison Chiles and Melissa Cantrell, both hospice nursing supervisors. (Norm Cannada | The Journal)

"I had things to buy," she said. "I had heard that they were giving gift cards for the first ... how many, I don't remember."

In fact, Soccio didn't even check the value of her card until it was time to pay for the items she was buying at the register.

"I was carrying (the card) around with me," she said. "When I was checking out. I was going to put my regular card in and I said (to the cashier), 'I don't have my gift card on there.' She looked and said 'Oh, it's here on top of the box,' and that's when she found it and put it in."

Then came the surprise for both Soccio and the cashier.

"She said, 'Oh my gosh, this is a \$500 card,'" Soccio said.

"I just kind of looked at her and I thought, 'You're not pulling my leg are you?'" Soccio said. "She said to the other woman, 'She just won \$500!' and we started dancing around. It took a little time to sink in."

The first 100 customers Friday morning received a gift card worth at least \$5, but only one had a \$500 value, according to Forester. It was part of the celebration of the store's grand reopening. Forester also presented a \$5,000 check to Hospice of the Foothills, noting that he had learned about the work of hospice organizations when they helped with the care of his parents in another location.

"They have such good community involvement," Forester said.

While the local Belk store had not closed, Friday's grand reopening was a celebration of the completion of remodeling the store has been going through recently.

"We have done a refresh," he said. "Belk has invested \$70 million in their existing stores over the past two years to give them a little remodel, refresh. We did it while we were open. We've gotten brand-new carpet, brand-new tile, brand-new bathrooms, brand-new fitting rooms, LED lighting, which is very bright and just enhances the color of all the clothing. It looks amazing."

Forester has been with Belk for 30 years but has only worked at the Seneca store since April. He said he had been involved in several remodeling efforts at Belk stores over the years.

"The employees here have worked very hard during this refresh," he said.

Jean McKinnon of Seneca was the first person in line to enter the store for the grand reopening. When asked why she came early to be first in line, she said, "To get a gift card, of course." She added she was a regular shopper at the store and was interested in its new look.

"We're looking forward to it, looking for what is going to be different," she said.

Kristal Tomlinson came from Toccoa, Ga., but didn't know about the special day or the gift cards until she got in line.

"I'm here looking for a bow tie for my son for homecoming," she said, referring to her 13-year-old son, Will, whose date had requested he wear a bow tie at homecoming. She joked that even if she had won the \$500 card, "my kids will all get the clothes anyway."