

Can't Find a Flag in Flag

By GAMIN SUMMERS

Special to the Sun

In the wake of America's recent tragedies, it has been difficult, if not impossible, to find an American flag.

Flagstaff residents, who were fortunate enough to have had an American flag before the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, are now waving them proudly all over town. On Townsend-Winona Road in Doney Park, a very large flag hangs about 20 feet off the ground from a rope that was tied between two tall trees. Some residents have many flags of various sizes on display in their yards. The patriotism is apparent, even in window decals and on cell phone face plates.

The merchandise, however, is increasingly hard to come by. Phone calls around town reveal that there are currently no American flags available for sale in Flagstaff.

Martin Boyce, general manager of Wal-Mart in Flagstaff, confirms that his store ran out of its supply of approximately 40 flags within the first day or two of the attacks. The store received another shipment late last week, he says, but they were gone within 10 minutes.

Other Americana paraphernalia has disappeared just as quickly, Boyce says. He put a shipment of USA license plate covers in the front of the store, and it was "gone in 5 minutes." Wal-Mart is not taking names or orders for flags or other patriotic merchandise, so it is all first-come, first-serve, to be fair to everyone. He expects more flags, but has no anticipated date of their arrival.

Keith Spidel, general manager of Home Depot in Flagstaff, has a similar story. Like Wal-Mart, Home Depot usually carries American flags year-round. The store, he says, normally has a lower inventory after Labor Day, and before the attacks it had about 36 flags on hand. Those were sold within the first two days after the attacks, and another subsequent shipment of 36 was gone within an hour of its arrival last week, he says.

He expects another shipment of 200, but does not know when they will arrive. He says Home Depot "buyers are buying what they can and spreading those out between stores." To avoid possible resale for profit, Home Depot has instituted a policy in the wake of the attacks that prevents a customer from buying more than one flag.

A spokesperson for Target Stores headquarters stated that, though Target usually does not carry American flags year-round, the company will be sending shipments of flags to local stores at least through October. The flags are "hopefully expected in stores next week, though this depends on the suppliers," the spokesperson indicated. She had no idea on the quantity of flags expected.

FLAG MAKERS TRY TO KEEP UP

Manufacturers are doing their best to keep up with the demand. Fred Vaynman is the owner of Flags by Delta, a manufacturer in Queens, N.Y., about 12 or so miles from ground zero.

He and his employees watched the destruction as it happened, and they are now determined to "sell a flag to everyone." His Web site has crashed from the weight of so many orders, so he is taking phone orders and has "all flags in stock — any size."

A 3-foot-by-5-foot polyester American flag is \$27, "the same price as before," he says. Typically, Flags by Delta used to receive 50 to 100 calls per day for flag orders. Now it is receiving 200–500 calls per day.

Richard Lewis, general manager of Flags Unlimited, Inc. out of Tampa, Fla., has been impressed with "the groundswell of patriotism. The entire industry is reacting as quickly as possible to meet the demand."

This time of year is traditionally a slow time for the company, but his employees are now working around the clock. The workers are proud to be participating in the effort to produce American flags, and temporary employees, previously used during peak times, have willingly come in to help. Many are working overtime, Lewis says.

The company's Web site has been inundated with orders since the attacks; the order volume has increased 10-fold. Because of the volume, they will only accept orders online and ask customers to be prepared for a six- to seven-week turnaround.

Patience, persistence and creativity may be necessary in order for those in Flagstaff to show their patriotism. A call to local stores will yield inventory availability, and several manufacturers and distributors have Web sites from which to order flags and other products.

In the meantime, several Web sites have printable flag images. One site, created Sept. 17, has had 898,000 hits since its creation, according to its counter.

JoAnn Fabrics is out of all patriotic fabric, according to store manager Janice Blackinton, but "a woman bought red and white striped vinyl and blue vinyl, and was going to make an American flag door hanging."

Web Resources

Flags Unlimited, Inc. — www.usflags.com · 1-800-989-3524

Flags By Delta — www.flagsbydelta.com · 718-418-3705

Printable flags:

www.geocities.com/usflagpics/home.html

www.printfree.com/AmericanFlags.htm

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