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Stein Mart opens in King of Prussia with discounted high-end merchandise

By [Gary Puleo](#), The Times Herald
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UPPER MERION >>After years of vacancy left by Sports Authority, a high-end, off-price retailer is working hard to attract shoppers back to the spot at 125 W. DeKalb Pike in the lower end of King of Prussia with vastly different wares.

That's not an easy task when you've replaced golf clubs with Gucci and Kate Spade handbags — especially when you're the new kid in town.

"It's a challenge, because our customer wasn't coming to this spot before, and if she was at all, she hasn't been here in two years. So she'll have a nice surprise even though she's no longer coming here to buy golf clubs for her husband," said Stein Mart district manager Vivian Jones, laughing.

The typical devotee of the upscale boutique-style chain's clothing, accessories, jewelry and home décor is a 30-plus, fashion-conscious, well-heeled woman, and she is just as likely to purchase a golf shirt for her husband while she's here taking advantage of irresistible prices on her own name brands, Jones pointed out.

"She also loves our men's department, where we carry fabulous golf attire like Bobby Jones, Greg Norman and Callaway. Women do shop for their husbands. I know I'm always calling my husband and saying 'we just got this in,'" added Jones, a veteran Stein Mart overseer who was tasked with helping to amp up the Stein Mart name in the Northeast region, where it is a relatively unknown commodity.

The Florida-based Stein Mart was founded in Greenville, Miss., in 1908 by Sam Stein, whose grandson Jay Stein now runs the company, which has nearly 280 stores, primarily in the Southeastern U.S. and Texas.

The chain made its Pennsylvania debut in Allentown 20 years ago and also has stores in Downingtown and Jenkintown, with plans to open at least seven more stores in the fall.

"We grew very quickly in the '70s, '80s, '90s, even early 2000s, but when everything slowed down economically, I was on the West Coast and we took a step back as far as not being overly aggressive at that point," Jones recalled.

With an intensified drive to "fill in the Northeast," Stein Mart opened a store in Long Island last fall, she noted.

"The Northeast is a market we believe we can grow. But I think we're going to have to remind people that this spot in King of Prussia exists now."

Walking into a meticulously appointed Stein Mart store is vastly different than what you'd see at other name-brand discounters, Jones allowed.

“We merchandise our stores more like a department store than a T.J. Maxx or a Marshalls. We’re more upscale than those retailers, but at a discount price.”

General manager Angela Jordan added, “We’re more like a smaller Macy’s, with discounted prices. Our customer is fashion savvy, but she’s always looking for a good price.”

Stein Mart buyers work directly with the vendors, Jones explained.

“We don’t buy runoffs. When we buy brands like Ann Klein we’re buying groups of merchandise, not just one or two pieces. So you’ll see the whole collection. That’s really a big difference between us and the other off-price retailers.”

Jones reached for a black leather Michael Kors handbag. The ticket indicated a regular retail price of \$358.

The Stein Mart price: \$229.

“If you would go into Macy’s or a Michael Kors store, you’d see that it really would be at that ‘compare at’ price,” Jones noted. “Our everyday low price is \$229.”

As she’s proven for decades, a Stein Mart customer is a customer for life, Jones said.

“She is very proud of where she is shopping and what she is wearing, and that she got this Michael Kors handbag at such a great price. And she will stay with us from her 30s until the time she has grandchildren and great grandchildren.”