

## Owner of local gear shop prepares for arrival of REI

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Salem Summit Company owner Al Tandy is smack in the middle of a challenging season for outdoor gear retailers.

As the calendar moves into the depths of winter, the 30-year-old is hoping to have the right amount of snowshoes, ice axes and jackets in stock for Salem's outdoor-loving holiday shoppers.

"I ordered this gear in July — you have to order six months in advance — so I have to keep in mind what's going to sell this time of year and what might be a hot item for a Christmas gift," said Tandy, who opened the business at 246 State St. one year and nine months ago.

Although December presents tests for any retailer, the biggest challenge for Tandy and his business likely will come later next year.

That's because REI, the gorilla of the outdoor gear market, announced plans to move into Keizer Station this spring.

Although the \$2 billion national multichannel retail co-op based in Seattle could threaten local businesses — they'll also feature a bike repair shop — REI will be targeting Tandy's main clientele.

"I wouldn't say that I'm anything more than slightly concerned," Tandy said. "I'm sure we'll end up losing some sales, but I think we'll be alright as long as Salem keeps supporting us the way they have. In the end, it still comes down to where people choose to shop."

Ironically, one of the main reasons Tandy chose Salem in the first place was that it didn't have an outdoors shop — a place that offered gear for backpacking, climbing and snowshoeing beyond the basics offered at Target or Walmart.

"I definitely thought a new shop would open (in Salem) eventually," he said. "To this day, I don't understand how a place this wonderful didn't have an outdoor store. I'm not sure I expected it to be REI, but I did think someone else would open."

As much as anything, Tandy said keeping his focus on customer service and emphasizing local ties were things that could make his business stand out.

"The local support for us has been phenomenal," he said. "All the money we make stays in the community. We specialize in great customer service, and when we're able to recommend a product someone ends up loving, that's really the best thing for us — and something that we're going to continue doing."

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