

# Business Day

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## A Voice Suggests Door-Busters Can Wait

Anthony Hardwick never thought of himself as an activist or even much of an organizer. He grew up in Kansas City, Mo., graduated from Park University in Missouri in 2009, and looked for a job by scouring the Internet for cities with low unemployment rates.

**JAMES B. STEWART**

**COMMON SENSE**

He settled on Omaha, where he found two — as a shopping cart attendant at Target and a printing supervisor for OfficeMax. There he met his fiancée, Denise Holling.

"Basically, I just wanted to pursue the American Dream," Mr. Hardwick told me this week, as the bearded, burly 29-year-old emerged as the unlikely hero of a nationwide movement to roll back the start of the holiday shopping season to the day after Thanksgiving.

Late last month, Mr. Hardwick's supervisor at Target told him he would be needed at 11 p.m. Thanksgiving night in order for Target to open its doors at midnight for Black Friday, which the discount retailer was doing for the first time this year.

"I'd have to be at Target from 11 p.m. until 4:30 a.m., then I'd have 30 minutes to scurry down to OfficeMax, where I was starting at 5 a.m.," he said. Mr. Hardwick makes \$8.50 an hour at Target, and between his two jobs earns about \$25,000 a year. "I used to be able to pull 24-hour shifts," he said. "I'd drink Red Bull. But now I'm 29, and I'm starting to feel it. I'd have to nap."

This didn't sit well with Mr. Hardwick, who figured he'd be sleeping while his fiancée and fu-

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From First Business Page

ture-in-laws gathered for the traditional turkey dinner. Although a Target spokeswoman told me the company did its best to accommodate employees who wanted the day off, this often isn't possible, and Mr. Hardwick said he wasn't given the option. Mr. Hardwick turned to the Internet and discovered the Web site Change.org, best known for a recent online petition to get banks to roll back debit card fees.

"A midnight opening robs the hourly and in-store salary workers of time off with their families on Thanksgiving Day," he posted on Nov. 3. "A full holiday with family is not just for the elite of this nation — all Americans should be able to break bread with loved ones and get a good night's rest on Thanksgiving!" He asked the Web site's visitors to join him in calling for Target retail stores to restore the 5 a.m. opening time on Black Friday.

But a "full holiday with family" has become increasingly elusive as competition from 24/7, 365-days-a-year Internet shopping has caused retailers to throw open their doors on a day once sacrosanct "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens," as Abraham Lincoln put it when he established the national holiday in 1863.

Franklin Roosevelt moved the holiday to the fourth Thursday in November (from the last Thursday) in an overt attempt to lengthen the holiday shopping season and bolster retail sales during the Depression. And the holiday's demise as a no-shopping interlude is the culmination of a steady retreat from pervasive blue laws that once banned shopping not only on Thanksgiving and other major holidays but also on Sundays. Today Massachusetts and Rhode Island are the last states to restrict shopping on Thanksgiving, and Paramus, N.J., the site of several major malls, may be unique in banning shopping on Thanksgiving and Sundays.

"The blue laws began in Massachusetts with the Pilgrims, so I guess it's fitting that we still have them," Jon B. Hurst, president of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts, said. "Christmas is sacrosanct. But there's been a bill proposed to permit shopping on Thanksgiving. It hasn't moved. We endorse it every year, but do I have members beating down my door to push this? No."

Among national retailers, Target is hardly the worst offender. Although some Target stores are open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving before reopening at midnight, Wal-Mart, the nation's largest retailer, has been open all day on Thanksgiving for years, and this year moved up its Black Friday door-buster specials to 10 p.m. Thursday. K-Mart and many Gap and Old Navy stores are also open all day, and a wave of stores, including Macy's and Best Buy, opened this year at midnight on Friday with special holiday promotions. Some retail-

ers are now talking about "Black Thanksgiving."

"For many people Black Friday shopping is now as much a part of the holiday tradition as the turkey," the Target spokeswoman said. "Black Friday has an exciting, euphoric feeling. A lot of our team members get very excited. Months of hard work have gone into preparing for this." She said Target moved up its store openings to midnight only after much deliberation, and the move had been "overwhelmingly popular" with both customers and employees.

Mr. Hardwick said he was aware of all this, and had modest expectations for his petition. "I



MATT HARNIK/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Anthony Hardwick wanted to spend the holiday with family.

## A protest as retailing chips away at more of Thanksgiving.

promoted it on Facebook and figured I'd sign up some friends and family," he said. "At first it just sat there." But gradually comments piled up on the Change.org Web site.

"I'm sick and tired of these attempts to brainwash us into thinking Christmas is about how much money we spend," Deborah Schwartz posted. From Bryce Allison: "It's a national holiday, not a national shopping day... maybe try giving thanks for your employees that bring you so much money!" Scotty Brookie wrote, "Encouraging people to shop in the middle of the night is bizarre."

David Breeden, a Unitarian Universalist minister in Minneapolis, saw Mr. Hardwick's petition in the broader context of the holiday. "Thanksgiving is one of the few civil holidays," he said. "A lot of people don't celebrate Christmas. But Thanksgiving is a national holiday and it's a day for giving thanks for what we have. What's wrong with stores opening at 10 a.m. on Friday? Everything will still be on the shelves when you unlock those doors. How about letting everyone breathe for a day and just relax? That's a spiritual issue, too."

New York Times reporter Stephanie Clifford mentioned Mr.

Hardwick in a recent article in which others expressed their dismay that Thanksgiving was turning into another shopping day. Other media contacted him. "I've been on TV," he said. "I spoke to NBC; I spoke to MSNBC, CNN, the Christian Broadcasting Network." People at Change.org helped him manage the attention, and he finally got to put his college degree in public relations to use. Thousands of online supporters flocked to the petition. "I was overjoyed and flabbergasted," he said.

He also drew his share of critics, most saying he should stop whining and give thanks that he has a job at all. "That was the same argument that was used when 7-year-olds were working in coal mines," he said. He doesn't belong to any unions or expect to join one, but "It hasn't been that long in our history that workers have had a voice," he said. "To give that up does my forefathers a disservice and I'm not going to do that."

Target has been handling Mr. Hardwick gingerly. "We have a great belief and understanding that team members should express their feelings," the Target spokeswoman said. As Mr. Hardwick's petition gained momentum, his holiday hours disappeared. He said his supervisor told him there had been a misunderstanding and "they were able to meet their staffing needs without my services."

Earlier this week Mr. Breeden, the minister, led a small group to Target headquarters in Minneapolis where he presented officials with Target shopping bags bulging with nearly 200,000 signed copies of Mr. Hardwick's petition. They had called ahead, and security guards in blazers and a Target official met them in the lobby. "It was all very polite and civil," Mr. Breeden said. "We weren't carrying bullhorns or trying to disrupt anything."

On Thursday afternoon, Mr. Hardwick joined his fiancée and future in-laws — and six newborn puppies — for a dinner of bacon-wrapped turkey, ham and side dishes before heading to bed around 9 p.m.

At OfficeMax, a customer had recognized him. "You're the Save-Thanksgiving guy!" He said he hoped that next year, Target would reconsider its early opening, or at least allow employees to opt out of Thanksgiving duty and hire additional workers from the ranks of the unemployed. "This wasn't really about me," he told me on Thanksgiving. "It's about my co-workers, my team members and anyone else in retail."

By 10 p.m. Thanksgiving night a line had formed outside Target's Bloomington, Minn., store, a scene that a spokeswoman said was repeated at their stores around the country. As the line grew to about 1,500 people, employees gathered inside, chanted and then counted down the seconds to midnight. They clapped and cheered as shoppers poured in. Supplies of a Westinghouse 48-inch flat-screen HDTV, offered at \$298, sold out in six minutes.