

"We don't need to," her husband added with a smile.

Bloomingdale's was the main draw for some shoppers, like Kimberly Karvo, a student at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in San Francisco.

"This was my first time ever going into a Bloomingdale's," she said, holding a yellow-and-black umbrella that the store gave away to people who signed up for a credit card. "I've seen it on TV and I've always wanted to go to one."

Susan Meyer, whose first job out of college was working in the men's department at the Emporium, came from Orinda to check out the new department store. She was looking for a dress and a pair of shoes to celebrate her 50th birthday.

Bloomingdale's would not release total sales figures, but general manager Alan Svensen said the store was selling up to \$100,000 worth of merchandise an hour at times on Wednesday during a preview.

While the mall officially opened at 10 a.m., shoppers were allowed into the center at 8 a.m. to avoid long lines in the streets.

But there were still some lines. By 8:45 a.m., the queue outside of H&M, the Swedish clothing chain, was more than 20 people deep. The retailer, which has two other San Francisco stores, offered gift cards worth \$10 to \$300 to the first 100 people who arrived.

Chiedza Kundidzora, a student at Laney College in Oakland, and two friends were first in line, taking BART to San Francisco and arriving at 6 a.m. to ensure a shot at the \$300 prize.

By the time the store opened at 10 a.m., 200 people had lined up, said Gerald Luna, media coordinator for H&M. The first 100 got the gift cards and others received T-shirts and other prizes, he said.

Not every line involved giveaways. Picket lines formed at both the Market Street and Mission Street entrances to the center Thursday morning, as members of the United Food & Commercial Workers Local 648 in San Francisco urged visitors to boycott the upscale Bristol Farms food store on the concourse level.

Michael Sharpe, the local president, said the union had asked Bristol Farms to allow workers to indicate whether they wanted union representation by signing cards instead of holding an election.

Bristol Farms refused. "That said, we are engaged in ongoing discussions with Local 648 in a sincere effort to achieve labor peace," Kevin Davis, Bristol Farms' chief executive, said in a written statement.

Employees for several retailers worked all night, scrambling to finish before Thursday's opening.

At Tom's Cookies, it was down to the wire.

"I sat on Santa's lap here 40 years ago, and now I'm sitting in front of my own store," said owner Tom Roach, a San Francisco native.

A few retailers missed the deadline.

CocoaBella, a San Francisco chocolate retailer with one location on Union Street, rushed to finish on time and would have made it except for one detail -- a safety device for the store's roll-down doors.

Owner Michael Freeman said the device didn't arrive on time and the store wouldn't meet fire-safety regulations. "Once it arrives, our doors will open and we will start selling chocolates to the world," he said.

Around 11 a.m., Beard Papa, a Japanese cream puff store, was still waiting for its water to be hooked up. The owners brought in cream puffs from their Mission Street store and said they hoped to begin baking at the new location later in the day.

All the hoopla next door meant a slow day for some retailers in the older part of the mall, said Dan Hauta, assistant manager for the Aldo shoe store.

"It's very dead," he said, before noon on Thursday. "People want to see the new mall. They're curious. Hopefully, later today when they're done sightseeing, they'll come to shop."

Chronicle staff writer George Raine contributed to this report.