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# **Shoplifting a Christmas tradition**

#### **By FRANK CHRISTLIEB**

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Battalion Reporter oplifting is a problem that has y possible solutions, but it is one is nearly impossible to solve. that is, merchants can take severrecautions against shoplifters and r diverse methods, but no matter v dedicated the efforts, shopliftgoes undetected or unpunished one reason or another in many

The shoplifting problem has faced arly all merchants at one time or her, no matter what size stores may have or what types of merndise they may sell

In fact, an article in the Nov. 27 of the Montgomery County ve decide Da ily Courier states:

According to crime statistics rebooks then ed by the Federal Bureau of Inigation, shoplifting is the biggest metary crime in the United ites, accounting for 14 percent of greath store bankruptcies ces. or den

yan-College Station merchants have and ha their share of shoplifting, even igh most stores are taking steps paper int th ard preventing its occurrence. Bobby Riggs of the Bryan

e Department said he is giving lifting seminars to Bryan mernts to inform them of different to protect against shoplifters said he also tells them about hods used by professional and

teur shoplifters "Employees should be courteous d acknowledge customers as soon ossible," Riggs advised.

everal area merchants said they e that this is one of the best ways safeguard against shoplifters. One necessaid if a customer enters a

Devices include convex mirrors, one-way mirrors, binoculars, cameras and an object which ooks like a vent, but is actually a type of eephole through which the top 10 the employees can watch for hoplifters.

> with the intention of shoplift-, there is less chance that he will if is greeted and offered assistance an employee. This, he said, is because a custom-

will then know that he has been en by an employee, and he will not comfortable enough to shoplift at leisure

Riggs said employees should tch for loiterers and suspicious ople, since they are possible shoner grades d

Merchants can take other precau- February

tions in order to prevent shoplifting,

Riggs said. For instance, he said, most stores limit the number of clothing items which can be taken into a dressing room at one time. He said it is best to place a limit on the number of items because if there isn't one, employees cannot possibly keep a count of all customers and how many items they bring into dressing rooms.

Another protective measure taken by some stores, Riggs said, is the rotation of clothing hangers on racks. He said if hangers are placed so every other one faces one direc-tion and the next one faces the other way, customers will not be able to take too many items at once.

This, he said, will prevent shoplifters from taking several items and putting them into a bag or otherwise concealing them in an attempt to steal

Riggs said merchants can also use different types of surveillance equipment and security to watch for shoplifters.

He said these include convex mirrors, one-way mirrors, binoculars, cameras and an object which looks like a vent, but is actually a type of peephole through which employees can watch for shoplifters.

A source at Skaggs Alpha-Beta said the store uses plainclothesmen and one-way mirrors, which appear to be regular mirrors on one side and 'windows" on the other side through which the store can be seen. These mirrors are placed on the walls throughout different parts of the store

John Holly, assistant manager of Weiner's in College Station, said, 'Increased observation cuts down on the number of shoplifters in our

Holly said plainclothesmen and employees watch the store closely, and because of this, shoplifting has not been a bad problem for the store. Shoplifters have many different. methods, Riggs said, and these

methods can be simple or complex. He said large purses, large coats or clothing, boxes, shopping bags and "booster boxes" are a few of the devices used by shoplifters. Riggs explained that "booster boxes," used by professional shoplif-

ters, are gift-wrapped boxes which have one end cut to form a flap. He said the shoplifter finds the items he wants to steal, opens the flap and puts the items in the box.

One merchant said shoplifters may use handbags with secret compartments, as well as coats with several pockets inside.

This merchant said shoplifting is greatest during the busiest times of the year, such as during the Christmas season and during January and

Holly said shoplifting seems to be greatest during the "predominantly gift-giving seasons" and estimated

that 75-80 percent of shoplifting takes place during the Christmas The most frequent shoplifters, Riggs said, are probably housewives. He said housewives do more family

shopping, so they are the people who have more chances to shoplift. Riggs said juveniles and young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 rank two and three respectively in

equency of shoplifting. There is a general consensus among area merchants that shoplifting cannot be totally stopped, even with all of the preventive measures that are being taken

One source said the problem is "so . . scattered out" that it cannot be

Shoplifting is greatest during the busiest times of the year, such as during the Christmas season and during January and February.

accurately pinpointed as to who is actually responsible.

He said the fact that only a small percentage of shoplifters are caught also makes the problem hard to overcome completely. Another merchant said it is hard to stop shoplifters unless they are actually seen concealing an item. He said if an employee is not sure of a suspect's intent to steal, he should not attempt to detain him.

But, he said, "They know and you now that if you don't see them get it, they can beat you at it." Riggs explained this is a big problem in defeating shoplifting because if after a person has been detained for shoplifting it cannot be proven that

he has shoplifted, embarassment and even a lawsuit against the business may result. In his opinion, he said, it is best to wait for a suspect to get through the check-out line before attempting to

stop him. Riggs said this way, a person will not be able to say, "I was going to pay for it," having already gone through the check-out.

The policy of each store usually determines what action is taken against a shoplifting suspect, Riggs said Several of the people interviewed

agreed shoplifters have nothing to gain by stealing items from stores. One merchant said, "It just doesn't pay for someone to shoplift.' Riggs said even though shoplifters usually have money to pay for the

items they steal, they steal them anyway.

Riggs said penalties for shoplifting can be anything from a Class C mismeanor to a third degree felony.

Shoplifting of under \$5 worth of merchandise is a Class C misde-meanor, and shoplifting of \$5-\$20 and \$20-\$200 worth are Class B and Class A misdemeanors respectively. Any shoplifting of over \$200 worth of merchandise is a third degree felony.

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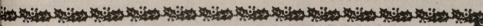


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> Music by the A&M Consolidated High School Choir.



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