

# Texas A&M The Battalion

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B-CS merchants preparing

## Season brings shoplifters

by Mark Coppock

**Battalion Reporter**  
Maybe it's happened to you. You're walking through a store and a certain item grins and winks amid the blank stares of the rest of the merchandise. You have to have it, and whether or not you have the money, the idea of getting something for nothing taunts your good sense.

Shoplifting losses totaled \$26 billion nationally in 1982, up from \$24 billion in 1981. It has been suggested that the rise in petty theft is due to difficult economic times. But Lt. Bobby Riggs of the Bryan Police Department said that most of the shoplifters his department comes in contact with don't steal out of need.

"They steal just to get away with it ... to try to beat the system," he said.

Dan Feldman, assistant manager of the Safeway store in College Station, said 85 percent of the people caught stealing in his store had the money in their pocket to pay for what they had tried to steal.

Businesses have tried to deter shoplifters by using one-way mirrors, convex mirrors, closed-

circuit television cameras, plainclothed store detectives, uniformed security guards and electronic tagging of merchandise in which a sensor at the door sets off an alarm if an item being taken out hasn't been paid for.

Dr. Hal C. Becker, an inventor and businessman, has developed another approach to discourage dishonest shoppers. "Dr. Becker's little black box" is a continuously playing tape machine that mixes its recording with a store's own recorded music or radio station. Becker's message is set at a low enough volume to penetrate only the listener's subconscious — or subliminal — mind. The message? The same thing, over and over: "Be honest, do not steal, I am honest, I will not steal ..."

Businesses must be careful how strenuously they apply their anti-crime methods. Sometimes this can run off paying customers.

A woman outside a College Station department store said: "A policewoman with a gun and billyclub was watching everybody (in the store) very closely. I have never taken anything that didn't belong to me and I felt

insulted and intimidated."

The most common method of shoplifting is to slip an item in a coat, purse or pants, Riggs said. Another trick is to switch price tags or boxes or to put one item in another, such as putting a tie inside a shirt and just paying for the shirt. Riggs said that although cashiers should be alert for these things, there is pressure on cashiers to move customers through quickly and they probably aren't able to catch everything.

Shoplifting traditionally increases during the holiday season. Lovie Washington of the College Station Piggly Wiggly said she saw more shoplifting in the week after Thanksgiving than in the two months she has worked there. While some shoplifters need and probably can't afford what they steal, such non-food items as cosmetics also are being taken, she said.

Two men caught stealing hair-spray said that they "didn't want to stand in line."

Some cities are offering to help out first offenders. In Atlanta and Washington, D.C., those convicted of petty theft for the first time usually draw some

kind of public service, including cleaning up parks or helping in hospitals. Riggs said there is no such program in his department.

In Texas:

- A first offender stealing less than \$5 worth of merchandise is guilty of a Class C misdemeanor, which carries a \$206 fine.

- A second offender or someone stealing \$5-\$20 worth of goods is guilty of a Class B misdemeanor, with a possible 180-day jail sentence and/or a \$1,000 fine.

- A theft of \$20 to \$200 is a Class A misdemeanor, which carries a one year jail term and/or a \$2,000 fine.

- A theft of more than \$200 is a third-degree felony, with a possible jail sentence of two to 10 years and/or a \$5,000 fine.

Dr. Mike Ash of the Texas A&M Department of Educational Psychology and Dr. Cecil R. Reynolds are developing a diversion program for adolescent shoplifters. He said they will discuss peer pressure and ways to avoid it, do some role-playing, hear what psychologists think about their behavior and be told what will happen to them if they should continue to steal.

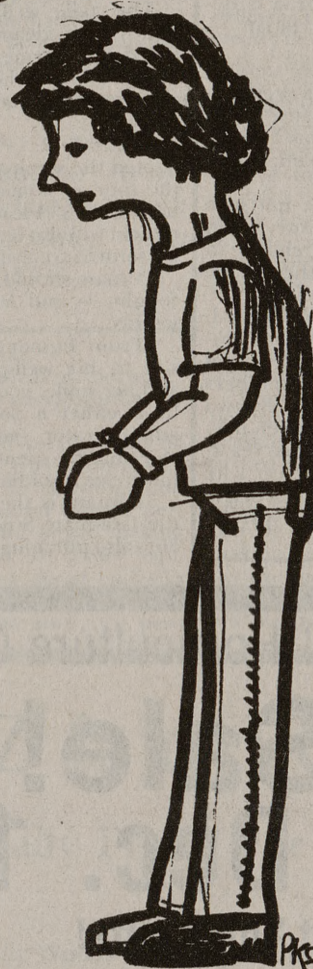
## One-stop shopping at center

**United Press International**  
HOUSTON — A 10-story showroom building, which will put manufacturers of furniture, wall coverings, carpets and other necessities of interior design and decorating all under one roof, is scheduled to be built in Houston next year.

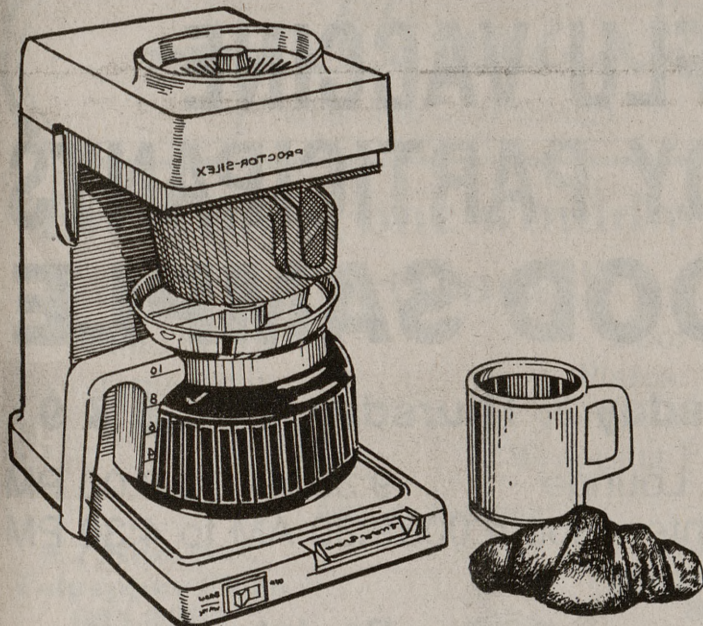
Although the Houston Design Center, a 500,000 square-foot, \$70 million building, will compete with showroom centers in Dallas, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles for the architects' and designers' dollars, its planners think there is enough of a market in south Texas to keep manufacturers busy.

"We felt that as the fourth largest city in the country, Houston deserved one centralized location for the buyers," said Neil Tofsky, director of marketing for Century Development Co., one of the developers of the center.

The center is a joint project of Century, the developer of the multi-use Greenway Plaza; Mischer Corp., a Houston-based group active in commercial construction, real estate development and distribution of air conditioning and heating systems; and Compedium-A Design Systems Corp., a Houston architectural and design firm involved in suburban office building development.

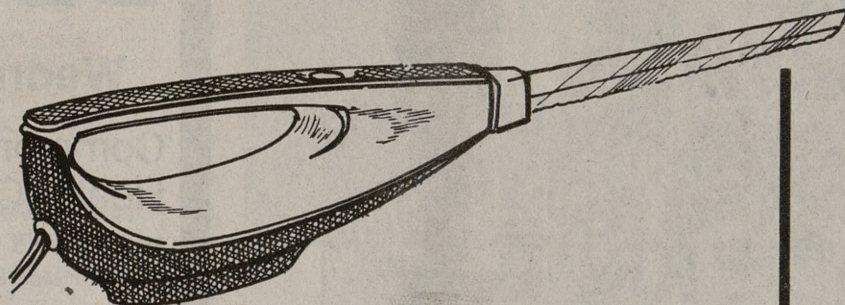


# 6 great gifts to put under the tree!



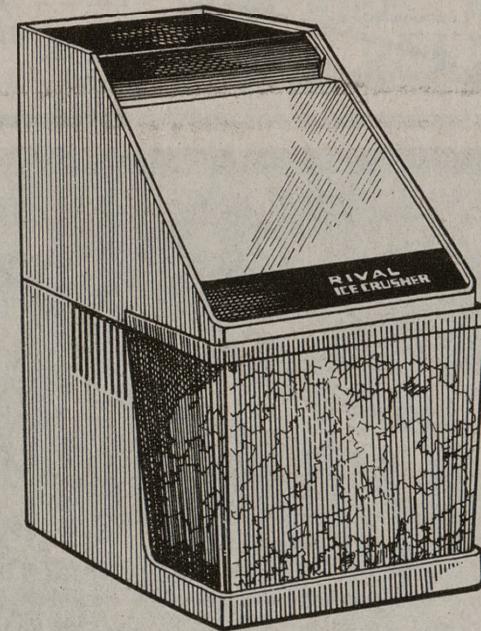
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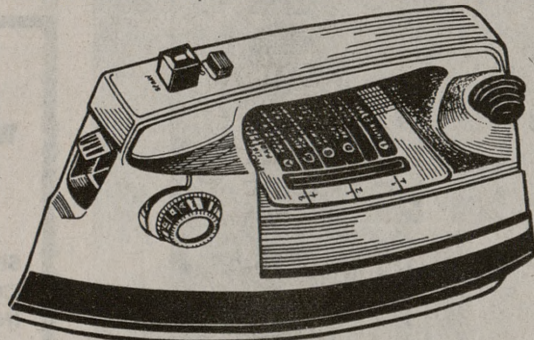
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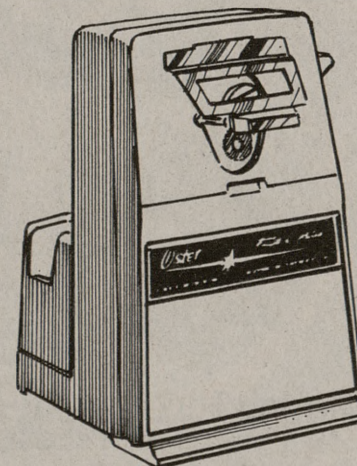
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