

'Tis the season of theft, shoplifting on the rise

By ANN BRIMBERRY
Reporter

Only 20 days remain until Christmas, and area department stores are crowded with people trying to find the perfect gift. But since Christmas also is the time of year when shoppers spend more money than they have, some people decide the easiest method of shopping is stealing.

"Most people shoplift because they feel the store is charging too much and this is their way of getting even," said Lt. Bernie Kapella of the College Station Police Department.

Shoplifting results in the retailing industry losing millions of dollars annually.

Store manager for Dillard's Department Store in College Station Roy Phillips said shoplifting is increasing on the national level.

"Those who are unemployed are forced to find money and this seems to be the easiest way," Phillips said. "However, the majority of shoplifters we apprehend are females between the ages of 18 and 25 years old who are doing it to supplement their income. This is unusual because other markets usually apprehend juveniles between the ages of 12 to 15 years old."

Many local stores have doubled their security in order to protect against shoplifters.

"We try to educate all the merchants on what to look for in the store," Kapella said. "During this time of year, the odds are greater that shoplifters will operate."

"The best thing to do to cut down the problem is customer recognition. Saying to the customer, 'Do you need any help? If not, then I'll be watching you,' will combat the problem."

Phillips agrees the best way to decrease the number of shoplifters is to give better customer assistance.

"We work with our employees and alert them a little more so they are aware of the problem," Phillips said. "If we recognize them in the department, and they know we are there, then the customers who are inclined to shoplift are a little more reluctant if they know there is someone watching them."

A strong in-store loss-prevention program is enforced by Walmart as well as a door greeting service.

"Going in and out of mall doors is

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an easy access," Wal-Mart Co-Manager Diane Hume said. "Greeters notice what the people are walking in and out with, plus we have an undercover guard that acts as a shopper and circulates throughout the store. At this time, we are apprehending about six to eight shoplifters per month."

K Mart Discount Store Security Manager Willie Lewis said shoplifting picks up the first day after Thanksgiving, when K-Mart averages four or five apprehensions per week.

"We tell all employees to watch the people who are alone and offer to help them," Lewis said. "A lot of merchandise is out now and the overheads will not be down until after Christmas."

Hume said, "Some (shoplifters) stuff the merchandise into large purses or suitcases. Others open big boxes on the shelves, conceal the merchandise and then try to resell it. If the checkers see that a box has been opened, they are supposed to check inside; however, some shoplifters get away with it anyway."

Kapella said women with long dresses can easily conceal stolen merchandise underneath their garments.

"Also, shopping bags containing trap doors at the base allows the shoplifter to conceal merchandise," Kapella said. "However, the more times a person steals from the same store, the better the odds are that they will be caught."

The prime hours for shoplifting are morning, noon and closing Kapella said.

"When the store first opens, the shelves are being stocked, and the less likely a shoplifter will be noticed," he said. "During the lunch hour, the sales force is cut down a great deal, and in the evening the people are in a hurry to get out of the store and are not paying much

attention to customers."

Wal-Mart prosecutes all shoplifters.

"We make sure they do have the item in their possession and they are outside the store," Hume said. "Then we ask them to take out the item they shoplifted, fill out all the appropriate forms for prosecution and call the police to come pick them up."

Lewis said they approach the shoplifter after they have left K-Mart and ask if the shoplifter forgot to pay for the merchandise.

"You always want to have a witness so they won't run," Lewis said.

After filling out a report on the shoplifter, the decision on whether or not to prosecute is determined by K-Mart's store manager. His decision is sometimes influenced by the shoplifter's behavior.

"If they are prosecuted," Lewis said, "they are really embarrassed when they exit the store in handcuffs."

The techniques used at Dillard's when apprehending shoplifters vary, Phillips said.

"Some months we apprehend 15 or 20 shoplifters and some (months) three or four, but needless to say, we don't catch everyone," he said.

Habitual shoplifters are usually very hostile when apprehended because they want to make a scene, Phillips said.

"With these people, we try to calm them down and get them away from a public place," he said. "We take them to a private area until the law enforcement people come and pick them up."

"We get a lot of different reactions," Hume said. "A lot of times the shoplifter claims he didn't take the item and it takes the police to convince him to tell the truth. However, some continually deny it, thinking they can get a lawyer later on to get them off."

According to state law, if the theft is for less than \$20, the shoplifter is fined \$219. An item priced between \$20-\$200 results in a fine from \$125-\$500 and one day in county jail, pending bail. The penalty for a stolen item greater than \$1000 could result in six months in jail.

"It's really not worth your reputation to shoplift," Phillips said. "What you're going to get is relatively small change compared to your reputation if you are caught and prosecuted."

A&M aids starving Ethiopians with donations to buy food

By TRENT LEOPOLD
Staff Writer

More than 200 million people in Ethiopia are facing a serious food shortage. To help combat widespread starvation in the country, several organizations at Texas A&M are collecting donations for those affected.

Tina Watkins, international student advisor at Texas A&M, said students wishing to donate funds to help ease the food shortage can do so at two locations on campus.

"The stands are in the Memorial Student Center and the Pavilion and should be set up until at least the end of this week," Watkins said.

Students, faculty and staff members donated \$242 last Friday and she said she is hopeful a lot more will be donated this week.

"The initial drive, which started last week, was expected to last through today, but since numerous organizations have joined the effort, the drive will continue through the week," Watkins said.

"The money being collected here will go directly for food costs in Ethiopia," she said.

Recent drought conditions in Africa are responsible for the critically low food supplies.

The current drought is the worst of the century, affecting 24 grain supplying countries including South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Without outside help, it is estimated 2.5 million people will soon die of starvation.

Current estimates indicate more than 200 million people have already been affected by the current drought and at least 150,000 Ethiopian children have died from starvation.

The United States government recently allocated \$45 million for food to Ethiopia and other African countries while the Catholic Relief Services of New York is planning to distribute 40,000 tons of food for its emergency nutrition program.

A spokeswoman for the Catholic Relief Services Beth Griffin said more money is needed al-

though a cooperative effort among four private agencies is expected to reach 1.5 million people in 13 of the most severely affected provinces of the drought-stricken country.

"The most pressing need right now is cash assistance to move grain arriving in Ethiopia," she said. "The food needs to be moved from ports to inland areas where it is needed."

"The joint action group has designed a plan calling for the importation and distribution of at least 200,000 tons of food during the upcoming year."

Griffin said commitment is required in Ethiopia so those now helpless can be able to help themselves.

"Immediate action is needed to stabilize the food situation and slow death and malnutrition in the country," she said. "Beyond that, rehabilitation measures will be necessary so those now facing starvation can return to their farms and villages where they can begin to lead productive lives once again."

Aggies outbled UT again

By TRENT LEOPOLD
Staff Writer

Texas A&M has outscored the University of Texas again. This year 2,060 pints of blood were collected here during the recent blood drive compared to 1,800 collected in Austin.

"We are proud of the amount of blood Texas A&M has given to Wadley (Institute) this year," Pete Smith, coordinator of blood donations at Wadley said. "We are looking forward to coming back in the spring to collect more blood."

For the past 26 years Wadley Institute of Dallas has been collecting blood on the Texas A&M campus. About 30,000 pints have been collected during the past 26 years.

Smith said a shortage of blood usually exists during the spring months because people postpone their surgery during the holidays.

Elizabeth Hill, coordinator for the blood drive at Texas A&M, said Wadley will be coming back to collect Aggie blood again this spring.

Texas A&M has an agreement with Wadley allowing the Institute to

collect blood on the Texas A&M campus for their use," Hill said. "In exchange, all faculty, staff and former students can receive free blood whenever it is needed."

"Wadley Institute appreciates our efforts and Texas A&M is proud to be able to provide such a vital service. It is really amazing to see how the students and employees at Texas A&M react to such a project."

Hill said during the recent drive some people had to wait in line for more than two hours to donate a pint of their blood.

Student Y to host Christmas service tonight

The Student Y Association is hosting its annual Christmas Service in the All Faiths Chapel at 7:30 tonight.

Kathy Ingram, Christian programs director for Student Y, said a Christmas tree in front of the chapel, decorated by different student organizations, will be lit at 7 p.m.

The Singing Cadets will perform and Father Bill Brooks will give the Christmas message at the hour-long candlelight service.

"We're (Student Y) encouraging everyone on campus to come to the service," Ingram said. Brent Boyd, Singing Cadet vice

president, said, "We've been doing this for many years."

"It's always an honor to be able to sing at functions like these. In the past, people have had to stand in the aisles at the Christmas Service."

Lunch Hour Christmas Concerts

Monday

Dukes of Aggieland 1-2 pm

Aggie Christmas Fair Rudder Exhibit Hall

Tuesday

A&M Consolidated H.S. Choir 12-1 pm

Wednesday

Voices of Praise 12-1 pm

Thursday

JAMU Symphonic Band 12-1 pm

MSC Lounge



Christmas from the Heart



MSC Hospitality