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Shoplifting stimulated by core growth, police say

By MARY GNIEWEK

Shoplifting rose 13 percent in Farmington in 1980 with 100 cases reported to police.

Public Safety Lt. John Santomauro attributes the increase to more stores and shoppers converging on the downtown center at Grand River and Farmington Road.

A majority of the prosecutions for stolen merchandise came from stores which moved into the old Federal's department store building in 1979 and 1980, including T.J. Maxx, Pier One Imports, Brands and Fayless Shoes.

"The stores are drawing a lot more people into town," Santomauro said.

"It's become an active area."

Many of those caught shoplifting live in Farmington, Farmington Hills or other suburban communities nearby. They include men, women and children and range from 10 to 75 years of age.

Some have been in trouble before but others are first-time offenders. They come from all economic backgrounds.

Casey Sullivan, a security guard for T.J. Maxx, has nailed 18 shoplifters since last August.

The store uses two-way mirrors, binoculars and floor scouts to zero in on the activity.

"Sometimes I spot one immediately

on instinct," she said. "You just know they're going to do it."

"I'VE CAUGHT ALL types — housewives from Bloomfield, people wanted for murder, drug addicts, and juveniles.

"Right now there seems to be a lot more addicts, because the price of drugs has increased considerably on the streets."

Twice last fall Sullivan nabbed persons leaving the store with garbage bags full of merchandise valued at \$500.

"They rip off expensive stuff and sell it, or return it to one of the (T.J.

Maxx) stores. They just want the money."

One percent of the store's gross sales profits last year were stolen.

"The problem is watching so many people at the same time," Sullivan said.

"You might watch one suspicious person for half an hour and at the same time someone runs out with the goods."

Grocery chains, drugstores, appliance outlets, even the Farmington Civic Theatre were targets in 1980 for shoplifters who took everything from nasal spray to peanut-butter cups and \$1,000 cassette recorders.

"I don't know if one store has more

of a problem than others," Santomauro said.

"We've established a good policy in the community regarding prosecution. It's one of the best deterrents."

Larceny from a building is a felony in Michigan. But the majority of shoplifters who are caught are charged with a misdemeanor and brought to justice in district court.

IN TERMS OF practicality, we draw distinctions," Santomauro said.

If it's easier to get a prosecution on a lesser charge, that's the route the police will take. The number of previous offenses, value of the merchandise, and

attitude of the business to prosecute are taken into consideration.

A majority plead guilty and are subject to fines, Santomauro said. Whether a person is shoplifting on a whim or a hard-core veteran, they're prosecuted and obtain a criminal record.

If a suspect pleads not guilty, a pre-trial examination and a trial in circuit court follow.

To avoid a situation where it becomes a security guard's word against the word of the alleged offender, suspects are shaken down in the presence of at least one other store witness.

According to national statistics, three cents out of every dollar consumers spend in a store pays for things shoplifters take and for security measures to fight shoplifting.

Housing market struggles with fluctuating economy

As another year brings yet another round of trying to sell homes with what some buyers view as extremely high interest rates on mortgages, real estate salespersons are trying to view the coming months with optimism.

While denying there's been an exodus to jobs available in the south, realtors admit the market is filled with available homes. Their problems center around making buyers eligible for mortgages on these homes.

"We have the largest amount of homes on the market in years in Farmington Hills," said Steve Barnes of Jerry F. Edwards Real Estate and Associates Realty World, Farmington Hills.

While many auto workers are leaving the area for other jobs in different parts of the country, Barnes says the Farmington area attracts middle-management level executives who are prone to being transferred again. That segment of the population keeps the housing market fluctuating in the cities.

"There's no mass exodus to the sun belt by any means," said Joe Bachleda of Century 21 Hartford 414, Farmington Hills.

He sees the housing market in the area being created through normal attrition, retirements, transfers and disgust with the area.

"THERE'S TOO much at stake with Detroit for people to pick up and leave," Bachleda said.

Instead of seeing a pattern in which residents move to the south in search of a more stable job climate, the realtors are inclined to place the blame for the glut of houses on the market on the mortgage interest rates.

"People think that all the rates are available to do is go up to about 87 percent. That's not true," Bachleda said.

"But obviously, prices will go up."

He advises persons interested in buying a home not to be put off by the prevailing interest rate on mortgages which currently hovers around 15 percent.

"You always have the ability to refinance as rates ease up," he said.

But his advice does have a Catch-22 quality about it.

"It's getting people qualified to begin with that's the problem," he admits.

Persons who make about \$30,000 a year and once didn't have any problem in qualifying for a mortgage now are having difficulties.

"The person who normally would be qualified can't buy," Bachleda said.

IN ORDER TO keep the market moving, realtors are turning to means of financing other than the conventional mortgage.

Assumptions on existing mortgages remain the favorite alternative among buyers, sellers and realtors.

But some banks requalify the interest rates involved in this type of transaction. In such cases the home buyer who wants to put down \$40,000 on an \$80,000 home and assume a \$40,000 mortgage may be faced with a hike in the interest which will be paid on the existing mortgage, Barnes said.

The higher interest rate defeats the purpose of putting a large down payment on a home, he said.

Yet realtors see a problem created for the seller by the state law which limits land contracts to an 11-percent interest rate and second mortgages taken out between the owner and buyers to 7 percent, Barnes said.

"The seller loses money each month that he holds a land contract," Barnes said.

But if the home is sold under an assumable mortgage, which also involves the seller taking back a second mortgage, then that gives both parties a compromise position in the transaction.

THERE IS ANOTHER option being used in California but not allowed under Michigan's usury laws. That alternative, the shared-appreciation mortgage or SAM, lowers the interest rate to one-third of the prevailing interest rate. But the new owner of the home is indebted to the bank for a percentage of the appreciation on the home within 10 years.

That means the homeowner who sells his house at a \$30,000 appreciation and is indebted to the bank for one-third of that, actually receives for himself \$20,000 but has faced lower monthly interest rates.



Winter scenario

It sure looks pretty, but this winter scene also can clear the roads, turn to Page 3A. (Staff photo by Randy Borst) to negotiate the icy roads. To see those in action who

Gala night ahead for Reagan fans

By MARY GNIEWEK

Donn and Shirley Wolf of Farmington Hills will have a bird's-eye view on Jan. 20 when Ronald Wilson Reagan is sworn in as the 40th president of the United States.

The couple is part of a 500-person Michigan contingent planning to attend the gala affair.

Their "by invitation only" agenda includes admission to a vice-presidential ball to be held at the Smithsonian Institution and the touted presidential ball being organized by Frank Sinatra.

The Wolfs were surprised and a little relieved when the fancy invitation arrived in the mail two weeks ago.

"We wanted to go so we were very pleased," Mrs. Wolf said.

Both were avid Reagan supporters early on.

Wolf, a Farmington Hills city councilman, was the Oakland County Republican campaign chairman, served on the Reagan steering committee, and was a precinct delegate for the former actor.

He helped arrange two visits — one to Birmingham, the other to Pontiac — by the President-elect. Wolf also served as co-host at a reception for Mrs. Barbara Bush, second-lady-elect, at the Botsford Inn of Farmington Hills.

Mrs. Wolf worked on the decorations committee for both Reagan visits and delivered campaign literature.

"A LOT of local people got involved who aren't usually politically active," Wolf said.

"Our home became something of a

Reagan headquarters. I remember one Saturday people from all over came to volunteer help. They realized they could make a difference."

Wolf said he became politically active in 1944, passing out literature for Thomas Dewey.

"My father had two house rules," Wolf said. "You had to go to church and you had to get involved in politics."

"I still do both."

The Wolfs will leave Detroit on a charter jet for Washington on Saturday afternoon, Jan. 17. They'll be staying at the Crystal City Marriott in Arlington, Va.

The whirlwind four-day trip includes a Jan. 19 brunch for the Michigan group and a parade in addition to the main hoopla.

Wolf says his wife "is keeping B. Seigel's in business" shopping for the excursion.

"I was on the phone with others discussing whether a short cocktail dress or long gown would be more appropriate," she said.

"The attitude seems to be the more formal the attire the better. We're going to go with long gowns. The Reagans seem to want this to be very formal."

The five Wolf children are excited for their parents.

"My daughter is picking out very expensive clothes for me to buy," Mrs. Wolf said.

She still hasn't purchased a long gown.

Wolf, a community and government affairs specialist for Detroit Edison, plans to frame the inaugural invitation and hang it in his den.

Fun Factory owner eyes expansion

By JACKIE KLEIN

Soon, bells will ring, lights will flash, shiny silver balls will flip, shake and rattle and tokens will jingle in Southfield's only pinball arcade.

Persons in Montgomery Ward's department store in the Tel-Twelve Mall can keep busy playing nine pinball games and 16 electronic games in an enclosed entertainment room in the furniture department facing the mall entrance.

Alfred Dinverno, president of Fun Factory Inc. in Milford will lease and soon open the Montgomery Ward operation.

On Dec. 22, the Southfield City Council approved the special use request of J.J. Jacobus, Montgomery Ward manager, to construct the game room and lease it to Dinverno. The approval surprised some city hall insiders who note that nearly all pinball parlor requests in this city have been rejected by the City Council.

But even this latest approval could be tilted.

THE SOUTHFIELD Police Department must still conduct a background check of Dinverno. If the report is unfavorable, said City Clerk Patrick Flannery, Dinverno will not be issued a permit to operate the arcade.

The Southfield Planning Commission urged the City Council to deny the request, saying the arcade won't fit in with other businesses in the mall, would encourage loitering and invite gambling.

Some commissioners say they're against the operation because of an investigation of Dinverno's Farmington Hills arcade.

City Council members maintain they approved the Montgomery Ward game room because it won't be open after the store closes at 9 p.m. Young pinball players won't loiter till the wee hours of the morning, they said, and will be in a controlled environment.

Dinverno, like legions of coin-operated game room entrepreneurs, claims he's been a victim of a prevalent attitude that pinball is a dirty word.

Dinverno said he has become a scapegoat for the problems of teenagers who find themselves on the wrong side of the law. Owner of two Farmington Hills pinball centers called The Fun Factory, he has been accused of harboring drug-pushers, loiterers and providing a hangout for young troublemakers.

Neighbors and adjoining businesses have complained about youths congregating near the business on Grand River just west of Middlebelt.

OTHERS HAVE complained of vandalism, excessive noise, speeding through residential streets and marijuana smoking in the Fun Factory parking lot.

Despite the accusations, Dinverno said he is determined to stay and prove his reputation business.

The Fun Factory was denied an occupancy permit by the city planning commission in Farmington Hills, but opened anyway, said Hal Rowe, zoning supervisor. The problem is Dinverno shouldn't have been there without a permit, Rowe said.

The city took Dinverno to Oakland County Circuit Court, where the city was tied up from October 1977 until September 1979. The case was then settled out of court.

Dinverno was cited for contempt in July 1980 for violating the consent judgment but the case is inactive, said court clerk Steve Kaplan.

Slapping Farmington Hills with a suit of his own, Dinverno has challenged the constitutionality of an ordinance barring young persons less than 16 from entering amusement centers.

He was granted an injunction allowing a person of any age to enter.

"We've got a policy here," Dinverno said. "Either play the game or leave the premises. The problem of loitering is widespread. But I've become a scapegoat for the neighborhood's problems."

"I've asked neighbors if they would

approve of an eight-foot-high security wall around the building so cars would have to enter and exit on Grand River — not through their streets. Some seemed to like the idea, but they don't want to cooperate.

DINVERNO SAID he employs a full-time security guard to enforce the law inside.

"Anyone we suspect of dealing drugs is banned," he said. "If they come back, we won't let them in."

At a Farmington Hills City Council meeting last year, Tom Dish, the owner of a Mavrick gas station nearby, complained that Fun Factory patrons were trying to sell his employees drugs.

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It's apropos to advertise in your hometown Observer & Eccentric classifieds. They work!

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Take a cue from Pat if you want quick selling results. And, remember one call does it all.

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