

Downtown merchants beef over crime rash

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Still reeling from the second break-in in 17 days, one downtown Farmington merchant is convinced the city is experiencing a commercial crime wave that police seem powerless to prevent.

Charlie's Place bar and restaurant at 23621 Farmington Road was robbed again last Thursday, the second time in 17 days it has been burglarized.

In Thursday's early morning break-in, coins were taken from smashed video and vending machines when a thief or thieves pried open the rear door of the bar. In the Aug. 19 break-in, Spaller and co-owner Bob Rock reported loss

of almost \$4,000 including \$1,184 in cash and 12 cases of stolen liquor and wine.

Spaller, a Farmington resident, says he's incensed about the failure of police to catch the culprit in either break-in. "There's no security in Farmington," Spaller says. "I can't believe all this stuff is happening, and nobody's caught and it still goes on."

The bar owner cites five other break-ins during the summer in the city and says the only police response is to recommend better security measures and equipment. Spaller says he's installing the costly equipment but wonders whether it will prevent another robbery.

"They could probably blow down the door and get away with it," says Spaller, noting that the police department is housed directly behind his bar, separated only by the municipal parking lot.

This summer the Old Village Inn and Dunleavy's Pub, both located on Grand River in Farmington, have been broken into by thieves with no suspects charged in either crime.

DET. JOHN COYLE, investigator for the Farmington Police Department, says it looks like the same persons who robbed Charlie's Place Aug. 19 and broke into the Old Village Inn on Aug. 28 were responsible for the Sept. 2

break-in at Charlie's Place. "We think they're the same people," Coyle says. "It's the same MO (modus operandi) or method."

What appeared to be "a good lead" on a potential suspect in the bar break-ins led to an interview conducted last Thursday, Coyle said, but the suspect was released after questioning. The person who was questioned was seen in the area by a police officer patrolling at the time of the break-in, Coyle says.

Spaller says other bar owners in town are disgusted about the increase in break-ins but are reluctant to state their views publicly for fear of alienating police.

Other summer break-ins include Howard's Beauty Supply, two at Wilson's Jewelers and another at Negative Outlook photo store, the latter two located in the Downtown Farmington Center. Wilson's Jewelers has also been victimized by grab-and-run thieves who asked to see a tray of rings and ran off with the entire display.

Armed robberies have occurred recently at Ray Interiors, Pennywise Discount Drugs and the Baskin-Robbins ice cream store in the downtown area.

COYLE SAYS the police department is close to solving two of the cases and urges the public to wait before passing judgment on the investigation process.

City Manager Robert Deadman com-

mends the detective work being done by the police department. He cited as examples the undercover arrest of two adult bicycle thieves working out of the downtown center.

Deadman says the department is concerned about the recent jump in commercial break-ins but says he'd hardly characterize it as a "crime wave."

"Small numbers make a wide variance in crime reporting in Farmington," Deadman said because the city is small. "You can get one or two burglars who give you the appearance of a major crime wave. But it's often all the work of one or two individuals who are usually apprehended."

Schools win case to insure

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

A two-year-old legal battle between the Farmington School District and its teachers' union ended Tuesday in Oakland County Circuit Court with the victory and spoils going to the district.

In a landmark decision, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Robert L. Tempkin Jr. ruled that school districts may elect not to insure teachers who are covered under a spouse's health insurance policy. Tempkin granted a summary judgment dismissing the case.

The case marks the first time the widespread practice has been challenged in the courts, according to attorneys on both sides.

"ALTHOUGH ELIMINATING double coverage is a practice that prevails throughout the country, this appears to be the first time its legality has been tested in either Michigan's higher courts or the appellate courts of other states," said attorney Denny Pollard of Clark, Hardy, Lewis, Pollard and Page, a Birmingham law firm representing the school district.

"Of course, they may appeal the ruling," he said.

Mary Job, Michigan Education Association attorney who tried the case on behalf of the teachers, said it is too soon to determine whether Judge Tempkin's verdict will be appealed.

"We have to wait a couple weeks for the judge's order (to dismiss the case) and then I'll have to talk it over with my clients. We should have a decision within a few weeks," Job said.

NEWS OF THE CASE'S outcome created a festive atmosphere at the Farmington Board of Education offices Tuesday. It is estimated that savings realized by the district's insurance program will continue to amount to about \$600,000 annually.

"It's been a long decision in coming, and we think an important one financially," said Robert Coleman, director of personnel and employee relations for the district.

"Because we've done this in the past, that \$600,000 has gone towards other school programs. Obviously we're pleased with the decision and think it was both a critical and fair one. It's a pretty common sense decision and one that's very important to us and to other districts in Michigan."

JOB CONSIDERS the decision a breach of the state civil rights act as well as a violation of Michigan public policy entitling married women to own property in Michigan.

"Under the civil rights act, all school district employees are entitled to the same compensation because they perform the same job," said Job.

"It is not appropriate or legal for an employer to determine whether an employee is entitled to compensation based on what a spouse makes."

Job submitted statistics to the court showing that as a result of the district's insurance provision, married persons, and particularly married women, excluded disproportionately from receiving insurance in terms of the total teacher population.

"Ninety-seven percent of those excluded in 1981-82 were married women," she said. "Stipulating that married women are not entitled to fringe benefits breaches Michigan public policy."



The cat's meow
The wide eyes of Gabriel Yashinsky show what an overwhelming experience a trip to a stuffed animal store can be. Gabe grabbed Felix the Cat because he's got one at home but there are 2,999 more from which to choose, as you'll find on page 3A.

Ovenware scam peddlers elude local police

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

THE Better Business Bureau (BBB) is investigating peddlers who last week sold discounted ovenware in the Farmington and Southfield areas.

The salespeople claimed in flyers that the ovenware is "microwave-safe." But a BBB spokesman said that, in a university test, the same cookware was found to crack under microwave heat.

Salespeople distributed the flyers in crowded stores and businesses, advertising 31-piece sets of Primrose Dream ovenware for \$20. The stated value of each set was \$99.50.

CHECKS BY the Observer revealed the ovenware company failed to secure solicitor's permits from the city clerk's offices of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Southfield.

The advertisement claimed a packaging error was forcing K&A Distributors of Robbinsville, N.J., to liquidate its supply of the "microwave-safe bakeware."

"This is the eighth year in a row the factory goofed," the BBB said. "The exact same set of ovenware has been sold in this (the Detroit) area using the same promotional flyer for the past eight years. The only difference from year to year has been the alleged value of the set, which has ranged from \$149.50 to \$52.49."

The factory-error claim has been used for several years in various cities, including Lansing, according to Michigan Assistant Attorney General Fred Hoffecker.

"THEY (OVENWARE peddlers) were here (in Lansing) this week distributing a flyer with a telephone number on it that was traced to a telephone booth on the corner of two major streets," Hoffecker said.

"We checked with the city to see if they complied with the local peddlers' ordinance, and apparently we chased them out of Lansing because they did not have the appropriate license."

By the time Lansing police could respond to the alert from the attorney general's office they were gone, he added.

"These people are so transitory that it's catch as catch can. How does one serve a truck? That's not a fixed location. You can't tack a complaint on a phone booth, and that's the problem we've got," Hoffecker said.

PRIMROSE DREAM is an assumed name filed with the Michigan Department of Commerce, Corporations and Securities Bureau for Kitchen Delight Inc. of Southfield, according to Kathy Corat of the BBB.

"The Southfield company manufactures ovenware to sell to wholesalers, but by the time the consumer is buying it, it is so far removed from Kitchen Delight that they're claiming no responsibility," Corat said.

"Several years ago, the cookware was tested at the University of Kansas, and it was found to crack. We approached the company about tests since they claim the ovenware is microwave-safe, and they said they would send us the results of tests they've conducted."

"We've never received them."

"WE PURCHASED a set of the ovenware and got a hand-scratched receipt on the back of the flyer. We checked with the city assessor's office and found that the address on the receipt belonged to a vacant lot in Detroit."

Telephone numbers listed on flyers were traced by the BBB to public pay phones in Detroit. Mailing the phones were high school and college students hired by the company.

The flyer circulating in the Farmington area last week listed a telephone number traced by Michigan Bell to a local pay phone that was disconnected six months ago.

Farmington City Clerk Josephine Bushey said a man selling ovenware stopped in at City Hall last week to complain about the disconnected number and to solicit business but promptly left when told peddling without a license is illegal.

Bushey referred the matter to Farmington Police Lt. Frank Lanhoff, who said the department cannot issue a local ordinance violation because "we don't know how to contact them."

"We're hoping people will call us if they begin to solicit in the area again," he said.

Selling without a license is a misdemeanor punishable by 90 days in jail and/or a maximum \$100 fine.

PEDDLERS PUSHING the ovenware in Southfield last week registered eight sales in one office building, much to the chagrin of Fret Metz, an employee who notified the BBB.

"Some guy showed up at our switchboard with a brochure offering a big

Please turn to Page 14A

Tell readers what you think

To be sure, one of the more frustrating parts of life is having to listen to the other person beef without being able to get in your two cents.

After all, everyone has an opinion and should have a forum in which to express it. In the old days penning a letter to the editor was a good way. But let's face it, fewer and fewer of us have time to write.

But a phone call just takes a few seconds and gets across your message in no uncertain terms.

That's why we at the Farmington Observer are launching our newest feature "Oral Quarrel." Every Thursday, we will field a question to our readers.

Here's your chance to tell it like it is. Just remember, keep it clean.

oral quarrel
IN THE COMING weeks we will field questions of local interest. Some weeks will set aside as an open line so you can sound off on any issue you so please. Of course, your suggestions on questions for Oral Quarrel are always welcome.

You may respond by calling us at 477-5498 from the time you read the question in Thursday's edition until noon on Friday. When calling, you will hear a recorded message relating the question. You will have 30 seconds to give a reply.

A select number of replies will be printed in the following Monday edition. Don't worry about giving us your name. All we want is your opinion.

To answer this question, call us at 477-5498.

what's inside

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