

Watch out

Awareness key to safety

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Personal safety is 90 percent awareness.

It seems too simple to be true, but Brenda Smith, an investigator and personal safety trainer with Comerica Bank, has solid evidence.

"We've lowered bank robberies (at Comerica) by 39 percent simply by training the employees to look-up and be aware of their surroundings," she said.

Smith said bank robbers are most concerned with being identified. If a teller simply keeps her head up and has a good look at everyone, the would-be robber will move on to another location.

The strategy is also good for anyone in everyday situations, she said.

One of the easiest targets for criminals is the automatic teller machine outside a bank. But if a customer makes sure the area is well-lighted and checks to see if anyone is hanging around, a robbery can usually be avoided.

Although many people fall into a routine, it should be avoided when criminals might count on it. "Most robbers carry a bank branch for one or two weeks," she said.

The same applies to people out walking, shopping or even driving to work.

'We've lowered bank robberies (at Comerica) by 39 percent simply by training the employees to look up and be aware of their surroundings.'

Brenda Smith
investigator and personal safety trainer

"Change your routine and be aware of your surroundings," Smith said.

If you are walking, it should be brisk. Personal protective devices, such as alarms that give off a noise similar to a car alarm, are available. And when you drive, your doors should be locked.

"I knew a man who was an expert in nunchucks (nunchaku — a form of martial arts) who wasn't worried about locking his doors," she said. "Someone jumped in his truck and pulled out a gun and made him drive around for seven and a half hours. He now locks his doors."

Smith, who spoke at the Farmington Hills Business Watch group Jan. 20, said staying away from poorly lighted parks and unfamiliar streets at night is one way to avoid trouble. But even busy malls and other places can be dangerous.

She related one incident where a gas-station attendant came out to a motorist and asked her to

come into the station because there was a problem with her credit card. She became angry and argued with the attendant, but he lent and went inside with him. He then pointed out that there was a man lying on the back seat of her car. They called the police.

Door locks should always be used in the home, preferably deadbolts, she said. And just like a bank, a house is usually cased. When you're away from home, have a timer turn lights on and off.

Valuables should be in a safety deposit box, not at home, and you should know an escape route and have a flashlight next to your bed in case power or phone lines are cut.

"Anyone can buy a uniform," Smith said. "Make sure you check for ID and call the company to see why someone is at your house."

Whether walking to your car from shopping at a mall or from work, have your keys ready.

"While you're fumbling around with your keys, someone has time to get to you," she said.

And a mobile phone for your car can be a life-saver, she said. If the car breaks down, you can call home, call the police, or call for other help. If you don't have a portable phone or citizens-band radio, you should stay inside your car until police come. If someone offers help, just crack the window enough to ask the to call for police or a wrecker, she added.

"If you are knowledgeable and aware of your surroundings, that's 90 percent of personal protection," Smith said.

'Bye Bye Birdie' at FHS



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Almost curtain time: Liz Momblanco plays Rosie Alvarez and Andy Wayne portrays Albert Peterson in a rehearsal for "Bye Bye Birdie," a musical comedy to be staged at Farmington High School Friday-Sunday, Jan. 28-30. Curtain times are 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets, available at the door, are \$7 for adults and \$5 for students and children. Farmington High is a 32000 Shiawassee.

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