

Smoke from page A1

to minors. Final results of Friday's sting were not available by press time.

Friday, decoys entered the businesses without any identification and with instructions to refrain from using trickery or arguing with store clerks when attempting to purchase a pack of cigarettes. They also wore typical teen attire, said Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

At a time when national attention to the teens-and-tobacco problem is rising, the sting fits in with the community's ongoing commitment to keeping all kinds of substances out of the hands of young people, Dwyer noted. "We're doing our part."

No questions asked

Inside Rite Aid, the girl placed the cigarettes and a package of chewing gum on the counter, but was not asked for her identification by the clerk, a 59-year-old woman.

"She asked me if I wanted a bag. That was it," the decoy reported to her sting teammate, Farmington Hills Police Sgt. Tim Swanson.

"This is the dirty part," said Swanson. "Giving grandma a ticket."

With the decoy staying in the unmarked car, Swanson entered Rite Aid and informed the manager about the cigarette transaction. Soon, the manager, cashier and Swanson were in a back office while the sergeant wrote a ticket.

Blight from page A1

need," he wrote.

The targeted businesses are mostly near the Grand River-Orchard Lake Road intersection. A particular sore spot is the condition of nearby storefronts, according to the city council.

"There are some people who have not been cooperative," City Manager Frank Laubhoff said last week. "Those will be handled through the civil infraction

'We don't do this to trick people. But we want people to be aware of the fact that kids come in' to buy cigarettes.'

Sgt. Tim Swanson
—Hills police

"She looked 18 to me," said the embarrassed cashier, who had a clean record. Swanson handed her the ticket and some instructions; the woman must make an appearance at 47th District Court.

The maximum penalty for anyone violating the city's recently enacted tobacco ordinance is a \$600 fine and up to 90 days in jail. Under the local ordinance, anyone under age 27 must be asked for identification when they purchase cigarettes.

"We don't do this to trick people," Swanson told her. "But we want people to be aware of the fact that kids come in" to buy cigarettes.

Swanson emphasized that only individuals selling tobacco to minors are ticketed. Businesses do not face any penalties, unlike for violations of the alcohol ordinance.

Rite Aid was the first of 20 stops Swanson and the decoy made at party stores, gas stations and other businesses on the west end of the city where cigarettes are available. Of the

first seven stops, three sold smokes to Decoy No. 3.

Not here

Meanwhile, two other officers and their decoy partners, both 16, worked in other parts of the city, such as the strip mall-laden Orchard Lake Road.

At the second stop, Jonna's party store at Grand River and Halsted, the decoy was unsuccessful in her cigarette purchase. The cashier asked for her ID and, when she couldn't come up with it, he told her "no sale."

Swanson said Jonna's management "probably does an excellent job of training employees and reminding them" not to sell tobacco — or alcohol, for that matter — to under-age patrons.

At the nearby Amoco gas station, however, the decoy again was able to quickly purchase cigarettes, without any questions from the cashier.

"She just said, '\$2.90 please,'" said the decoy, returning to the car.

The decoy made it three out of four at the Mobil Mart, near Grand River and 10 Mile Road. A relatively new employee sold her another pack of Marlboro Lights, even though the cashier wore a "We Card ... Under 18 No Tobacco" pin on her shirt. "That warning also was clearly spelled

out on a laminated sign, on the counter."

An apologetic manager pulled Swanson aside, explaining that the guilty party only started working there about a month ago. "When you're new, you make mistakes," he said.

Over at Marathon, 10 Mile and Industrial Park Drive, the decoy went through the same routine. But this time, she was refused the pack of cigarettes.

"We always check," said the employee, Nidhal Azizian. "Even if they come back all the time."

Azizian added that there's a good reason why she is so diligent. "It's my kids, too. I don't want them to smoke."

Letters were mailed to businesses following the first tobacco sting. Dwyer said those letters notified them that "we'll continue with these enforcement activities" in the future.

Swanson said such awareness-building efforts are long overdue.

"Tobacco is something that was overlooked for many years," Swanson said. "It's something that needs to be addressed. Kids have been purchasing cigarettes for



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRENNER

Briefing: One of the decoys is briefed Friday morning by a Farmington Hills officer before the sting begins.

years with little concern, even though there are laws on the books."

Hire from page A1

and needed help."

Police presence

Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said his department was called "several times" to the address for disturbances.

Kuchciak was involved in a bitter custody battle over the 3 1/2-year-old son she'd had with D'Annibelle.

Dwyer said his department began investigating the woman after it received a tip she "was looking for a hitman" to kill her former boyfriend.

Dwyer said she "had been shopping vigorously to do this for two weeks. One guy turned her down" before his department, working with the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, set up a meeting between Kuchciak and a police operative in a downtown Royal Oak on a recent Friday night.

According to the taped conversation, Kuchciak said she not only wanted D'Annibelle killed, but "she wanted him to suffer," said Dwyer.

He said she alluded to the idea it was a "win/win" for her because her son is the beneficiary of the insurance policy and she also would get custody of him, D'Annibelle has custody.

She also "made it very clear" what she thought would be a good way "to remove him, saying the best way to take him out was as he was leaving his business" located off of I-696 and carjack him, the chief said.

Kuchciak said "there may be a bonus in it" for the hitman because she said D'Annibelle was known to carry large sums of money and he drives a Yukon.

"She said she would do it herself but (couldn't) because she would be the prime suspect."

Dwyer said.

Kuchciak offered the operative \$3,000, half up-front, to do the job. "She wanted it done by Halloween. She said Halloween would be best because of all the 'confusion' it creates, he said.

Dwyer, calling her "very cold, calculating," said he and investigators felt "if we were not able" to stop her, "she would have found someone to do the hit and he would be dead."

He said Kuchciak was charged with assault in 1986, 1995 and 1996. The first two incidents involved "dangerous weapon" charges, Dwyer said. She pled guilty in 1996 to being an habitual offender, meaning her next conviction would put her in prison.

Protection order

He said D'Annibelle had a personal protection order against

her and she also had been prohibited from both carrying or buying a weapon.

Police used a ruse to get Kuchciak to the station, Dwyer said.

Because she also was a burglary suspect, police previously had searched her home and taken some items. One was a ring she wanted.

She kept calling Hills police to get it back, so "we called her to come to the station for the ring," said Dwyer. "She was arrested when she showed up about 3 p.m. Wednesday."

At her arraignment Thursday, Kuchciak, a slim woman with long brown hair, said she worked for her parents' landscaping company and as a waitress.

Police said she had two other children by other men.

Liquor from page A1

ton Hills.

Putt said the department is "very happy that no one sold alcohol to the 17-year-old decoy. One main reason is that businesses act in a responsible manner."

"We do a good job on enforce-

ment," Putt said. "But businesses and restaurants also are taking responsibility for not selling" to minors.

The penalty for serving to minors includes a ticket and referral of the case to the Michigan Liquor Control Commission.

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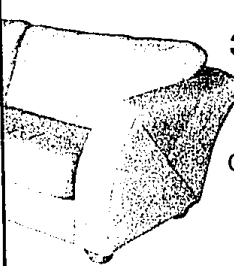
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