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Sharon and Ken Smith recently received the Top Dog Award for operating the best dealership in terms of percentage of sales increase and service for the Invisible Fencing Co. Candy, the couple's Golden Retriever, has personal experience with the system.



Invisible fencing limits pets' range

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Cami Annas of Bloomfield Hills and Christine Koski of Farmington Hills rave about the product.

It's made life more pleasant for Tank, Patch, Chester, Nicky, Lady and hundreds of other dogs.

And it's proven to be a successful business venture for Sharon and Ken Smith of Birmingham.

The husband-wife team owns and operates Invisible Fencing of Birmingham, a dealership that installs underground, radio-controlled pet containment systems.

The Smiths recently won the company's Top Dog Award for the largest annual percentage increase in sales and quality service among the 225 dealers in the network. "What made our business successful is it works," Sharon said. "It's the kind of thing people don't believe does, but it works."

INVISIBLE FENCING of Birmingham had gross sales of well over \$500,000 and installed more than 500 containment systems last year, Ken said.

"This is a tremendous alternative, maybe the best way to go for containing a dog in the yard," he said. "In subdivisions where no fencing is allowed and there are tough leash laws, most people wouldn't get a dog."

Unless they buy a product like Invisible Fencing, he said.

Here's how it works: Wiring is buried 2-3 inches underground around the area you want the animal to be contained. A transmitter is hooked to the wire, a radio-receiver collar attached to the dog.

Flags or rope is placed around the perimeter for the animal to see. The dog is led around the perimeter on the leash to explore the boundaries. A warning beep precedes a shock by an instant.

THE PET usually becomes conditioned to the boundaries in a week with few shocks, Ken said. "It is harmless, very mild and starts them more than anything," he said of the shock. "When they hear the beep and see the flags, that's enough to warn to keep back."

'The thing that concerns us is it shocks the animal.'

— Gary Lucerna
Humane Society

The hardware and installation costs about \$1,100 for 600 linear feet. A few general observations about the system from Ken and Sharon:

- The transmitter, because it sends out pulsating, low-frequency radio waves, won't interfere with neighbors' appliances.
- Dogs should be at least six months old to learn the system. Older dogs can be trained. The ease or difficulty of training depends on the temperament of the individual dog, not the breed.
- The failure rate is about 1 percent.

THE SMITHS can vouch for the product from personal experience. Their dog, Candy, a Golden Retriever, took to the system like a fish to water.

"When we moved from Philadelphia, we brought our transmitter collar system with us," Sharon said. "When we got here, we figured we'd have the wiring system installed. We found no one had a dealership here."

They practically begged us to start a dealership here," Ken said of Invisible Fencing Co., headquartered in Pennsylvania.

That was about six years ago. Sharon ran the business herself out of the home for a couple of years, then leased offices in West Bloomfield. Ken, who had been a sales representative, jumped in full time in 1989. Now, they have six inside employees and four sub-contracting installation crews.

Referrals account for most of the business, Ken said he knows of no local competitors.

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Beware of mail solicitations

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Tough economic times often bring out get-rich-quick schemes.

Police, a postal inspector and an investment adviser warn consumers to beware of plans that seem too good to be true.

"They can come up any time, but especially when financial climates are down," said Lt. William Tullock, who heads the Troy crime prevention bureau.

"Absolutely it picks up," said Sid Mitra, a certified financial planner, college instructor and a columnist for the Observer & Eccentric.

"That's a point you can easily make. People are looking everywhere for comfort."

"Given the sign of the times, the economic situation, things like this would seem very attractive to people," said Officer Lisa Hale, Garden City crime prevention officer.

"That's when people are desperate to make ends meet and grasp at straws," said Fred Van de Putte, a postal inspector in Detroit.

ONE LETTER now circulating in metro Detroit presents what it claims is a legitimate opportunity to earn money through a multi-level marketing mail order business. But

authorities have their doubts.

The six-page letter offers the chance "to make at least \$50,000 in less than 90 days in the comfort of your own home."

Recipients are asked to send \$5 cash to each of four people on a list in exchange for reports about multi-level sales programs. Recipients then are directed to add their names to the letters, move the other names around and send copies to more people.

Van de Putte said he intends to send a copy of the letter to the special investigations division in Washington.

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Employees account for much theft

By David F. Stein
special writer

The kindly grandmother sitting through the sales table at the local Sears or Hudson's may really be a loss prevention employee, while electronic eyes keep watch overhead. But man and machine are not only guarding against customer theft. All eyes also are on employees, and for good reason.

While more than 93 percent of

those caught stealing in 1989 were customers, employees caught shoplifting took nearly seven times more per person, according to the 12th annual "Dance of Prevention" survey of 160 retail companies nationwide. The average recovery per customer apprehension in 1989 was \$196, compared to \$1,350 per employee apprehension.

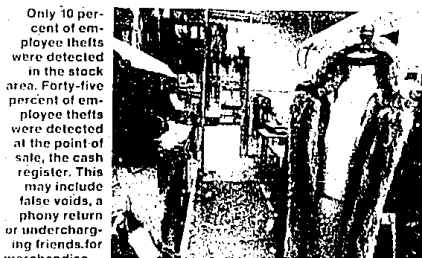
The survey, co-sponsored by Ernst and Young, a retail professional services firm, and the International

Mass Retail Association, includes data from Michigan department and drug stores, mass merchants, supermarkets and specialty stores. National sales for the 160 companies surveyed topped \$193 million in 1989.

"Employee theft is absolutely a problem," said Michael P. Fricker, loss prevention manager at Sears Roebuck and Co. It's a freedom situation, employees are there every day and they present a great risk because of access to merchandise and cash.

But overall retail loss, called shrinkage, consists of paperwork errors, as well as customer and employee theft. Total shrinkage for the survey firms increased slightly from 1.89 percent of retail sales in 1988 to 1.91 percent in 1989.

AT THE SAME TIME, companies spent an average \$2.5 million to battle shrinkage, a 20-percent increase from 1988 to 1989. The money went for sophisticated merchandise accounting and tagging systems and electronic surveillance in addition to employee training and old-fashioned detective work. Personnel costs were 73 percent of the security and



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