

# Stolen

from page A1

stalled the pair for nearly a half-hour while pretending to phone other places to get appraisals on an expensive set of golf clubs and hockey goalie leg pads.

"We kind of played coy with them," Eckler said.

## Team effort

Also getting a well-earned assist is the victim, a Novi attorney, who immediately phoned the Farmington Hills store with a list of items stolen from his garage. The thieves stole hockey equipment belonging to him and his 13-year-old son who plays AA pee-wee for Compuware.

Play It Again employees cross-checked the purchased gear with the list and phoned police.

"We'd certainly commend the Novi resident for his diligence," said Chuck Nebus, Hills assistant police chief. "He was a super sleuth himself ... He was the one who took the initiative to contact Play It Again Sports to tell them to watch out for it."

Play It Again Sports has a good working relationship with police, Nebus said. The store maintains a stringent policy when buying used equipment in order to thwart thieves looking to unload goods to score quick cash, a store manager said.

People have to provide a valid driver's license when selling used equipment. Instead of cash, the store always gives a check to start a paper trail. Police reports involving break-ins in which sporting goods have been taken are also sent to the store.

At the Farmington Hills location, there have been four cases of people trying to sell stolen property this year.

"Most of the time we question individuals when things look suspicious where they have something that doesn't look like they should," Wolf said.

Store employees have to be vigilant but not overly presumptuous, either. In a middle-class area, it's not uncommon for people to own high-end sporting goods, Wolf said.

He once had a situation where a 17-year-old was trying to sell a \$1,000 set of golf clubs. He made the teen's mother phone him to get her permission. The mom wasn't too happy.

"It's a fine line," Wolf said.

## Limited role

Store management doesn't want employees - who are often themselves teens - playing police. They're told not to try and physically detain suspicious sellers, who may be desperate and dangerous.

"I don't want the safety of our employees endangered. They're good kids," Wolf said.

## Store

from page A1

er, Venable said.

The company is not shy about trumpeting its strategy, though.

Walgreens' goal is to have 3,000 stores by the year 2000. Already, the chain has 2,613 outlets in 36 states and Puerto Rico, including 44 in Michigan. It employs 60,000 people nationwide.

Developers for the retail chain look for sites by heavily traveled intersections near densely populated areas. Part of Walgreens' thrust is to enter new markets while "densifying up" existing ones.

"When we refer to 'densifying up,' it means we've been in Chicago for 100 years, but we're continually adding store to fill in pockets that are underserved," Venable said.

Walgreens has computerized pharmacies, drive-through service and one-hour photo finishing.

In November, the company announced \$14.2 billion in sales, which is a nearly a 16-percent increase from the previous year.

## Talk to Santa on the air

If you want to talk to Santa Claus, there's an opportunity waiting just for you.

The "Talk to Santa" program will air at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 16, on Farmington's cable access Channel 15.

The call-in show allows kids to call in and talk to Santa, not to mention tell him what they want for Christmas, or even ask questions about Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

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Chuck Nebus  
—Assistant police chief

Nick Simkins wholeheartedly agrees. He phoned Play It Again after he and his son's hockey gear was stolen.

The employee carefully took down all the information, Simkins said. When Simkins asked for phone numbers of other Play It Again locations, the clerk told him not to worry about it: He'd inform the other stores himself.

"I thought that was pretty cool," Simkins said. Two hours later, the excited employee phoned

Simkins to tell them about the arrests.

Simkins also had kind words for the Novi and Hills police, especially Nebus who made sure the hockey equipment made it back to the rightful owners in time for their games.

"If you could call something like this a positive experience ... as a citizen it was nice to see the whole system work," Simkins said.



Thwarted: Employees at Play It Again Sports were on the ball when they double-checked some items that turned out to be recently stolen. Police were contacted and arrests made immediately following.

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