

Burglaries plague local business

Authorities: Economy may be responsible for recent crime spike

By ROBERT NAPPER - rnapper@bradenton.com

MANATEE — Burglars have crippled Stephen McCarty's business.

A smash-and-grab burglary Nov. 21 at his Gulf Coast Jewelers store, in the 1400 block of 57th Avenue West, has him out \$26,000 and counting after burglars destroyed his glass front door and a half dozen display cases, making off with his valuables inside.

With no insurance, McCarty is now looking to sell everything he owns just to keep the power on and feed his kids.

"They took everything. That jewelry was my savings. With this economy, I am not selling enough to offset what they took," he said. McCarty said he has struggled to even make repairs to his shop.

"I was barely able to afford a new front door. For a while, it was plywood," he said.

Authorities say McCarty is by no means alone in being a victim of burglary.

More and more, burglars are leaving behind damage from smash-and-grabs. On the same day as the Gulf Coast burglary, someone smashed in the glass front door of Petrol Mart, in the 6500 block of 14th Street West, and stole \$5,000 worth of lottery tickets.

Then on Nov. 23, someone threw a brick through the glass front door of Popi's Place restaurant, next to McKechnie Field in the 800 block of 17th Avenue West. That burglar made off with pocket change, according to Bradenton Police reports.

Sheriff's reports say on Nov. 24, Larry D. Brown, 56, threw a cinder block through a glass door at the El Soy Latino grocery, in the 5700 block of 15th Street East.

Brown made off with change, Mexican hats and Mexican food before a family member turned him in, according to sheriff's reports.

He was being held in the Manatee County jail on a burglary charge on \$35,000 bond.

Manatee County Sheriff's Office spokesman Dave Bristow speculated that tough economic times could be spurring a spike in burglaries.

"We are seeing quite a few burglaries, especially of cars.

“The economy may have something to do with it,” said Bristow.

Statistics bore out Bristow’s assessment. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement reported that burglaries in Manatee County spiked 11.8 percent in the first six months of 2008, compared to the first six months of 2007.

In Palmetto, burglaries skyrocketed 44.7 percent.

“We are still getting a bunch of them,” said Palmetto Police Lt. Scott Tyler.

Ray Corda owns a business in unincorporated Manatee near Palmetto, and after a third burglary at Manatee Mobile Marine, in the 3800 block of U.S. 41 North, he got fed up.

On Sept. 24, someone entered his boat yard and stole more than \$15,000 worth of motors. Since then, he now relies on a 7,000-volt electric fence he had erected around his business.

Corda said he lost customers who had their motors stolen during the latest burglary, and he wanted the fence to give his customers peace of mind.

“When people do this, they don’t understand how much damage they are doing. Not only is there the cost of what is stolen, but it cost me business,” Corda said.

“I have called my customers to tell them about what I have done for security.”

Corda’s piece of mind comes at a cost of \$500 a month, which includes installation and monitoring services provided by the fence’s maker, Sentry Security Systems LLC.

It is an expense Corda says is well worth it.

“It helps me sleep at night,” Corda said. “If somebody touches the fence they not only get a shock, but I also get an immediate call from the company that contact with the fence has been made.”

Bristow said business owners like Corda do well to take steps to protect their businesses from burglaries.

“I grew up on a farm and have been shocked by an electric fence. I can tell you, it doesn’t feel good. So I think it could work,” Bristow said.

Business owners should also consider investing in surveillance equipment, according to Bristow. Recovery of stolen goods could depend on it.

“It is very helpful for us in investigations after the fact,” he said.

Robert Napper, Herald reporter, can be reached at 708-7024.