

Buy-and-sells look out for 'hot' items

But if shops buy goods, they only have to hold them seven days

By Debbi Roberts
Of the Emerald

A distraught woman carries a list of stolen items into a Springfield "buy-and-sell" store. She looks desperate.

Her house has recently been broken into — she's checking all the local buy-and-sell shops for her television, stereo and her husband's shop tools and chain saw. The police suggested she check the shops on her own — they have a backlog of burglary cases and won't be able to get to her case as quickly as she wanted, she says.

Barbara Campbell, owner of AA Action store at 525 Main St., offers the woman a sympathetic smile. The store doesn't have any of the items, but Campbell has witnessed the woman's anxiety before.

"We once had a man looking for a stolen medallion his son had taken and sold," Campbell says. "He was so worried. He checked every store and finally found it in Reedsport."

'A man came in looking for a pocket watch that had been in his family for years. He thought his son had stolen it.'

Sales clerk Doris Carter of J.R.'s Buy and Sell Store, 1430 Willamette St., in Eugene relates a similar experience.

"A man came in looking for a pocket watch that had been in his family for years. He thought

his son had stolen it," Carter says. "If we had it, we would have given it to him."

Most people mistakenly call the buy-and-sell pawnshops, but there are significant differences between the two.

"We don't lend money. We just buy the item outright. Pawnbrokers need to follow bank lending laws," says J.R. Stultz of J.R.'s.

"Pawnshops need three times the storage space as an ordinary store," he explains. "They have to hold items for up to a year before they can sell it. We just have to hold it for seven days."

Stultz's store — which he has owned for five years — has a wildly cluttered look. Although there are guitars, stereos, antique guns and old coins jammed into one room, every item is registered and held for a week while police determine whether it is stolen.

"Pawn shops are being phased out in Lane County," says Tom Hooker, a Eugene Police Dept. detective. Because of the length of holding time, pawnshops aren't financially feasible in a poor economy, he says.

"People used to use pawnshops as a place of storage for a year and then rebuy their items," Hooker says. "Buy-and-sell" stores are becoming viable and are replacing pawn shops, he says.

"The nearest pawnbrokers (now) are 90 miles south and 90 miles north of Eugene," says Harold Kunkler, a Springfield Police Dept. detective.

"Buy and sell" owners and employees must learn to be good judges of character — otherwise they can get stuck with "hot items," Campbell says. If the police discover an item has been stolen, the owners lose the item as well as what they paid for it.



Photo by Mark Pynes

Buy-and-sells may be "wildly cluttered," but every item is assiduously registered with the police.

Sellers, therefore, must present photo identification before an owner will make a purchase.

"As a rule, if they don't show you any picture ID, they just walk out the door with their items," Campbell says. If she gets "bristles" — senses an item is stolen — she calls the police to check out ID numbers.

Some (stores) cooperate a great deal with us," Kunkler says. "If they get a 'hot' item, they'll seize it and call us. People split then."

In July, nine stolen items were recovered in Eugene at buy-and-sell stores. "A rough estimate of value would be about \$3,800," says Hooker, who credits the stores with

much of the credit for the recoveries.

"Most stores make an effort not to buy stolen property because they lose their money and the item," he says.

Although Hooker says he believes the seven-day holding period "isn't long enough," he believes the cooperation between stores and police is an effective way of recovering stolen property. "It's not uncommon for people to go on their own and contact stores to (attempt to) recover their property."

Police encourage people to check out buy and sell stores to recover their items, but "there's no yardstick to determine the

success rate," Hooker says.

"There's not a very good recovery rate of stolen items because of poor descriptions by victims of crimes," Kunkler says. "Some people don't even know the names of their stereos. We encourage people to check out these stores, because if they can see the items, they'll know they are theirs."

Hooker mourns the passing of the pawnshop, and especially misses the three glass balls hanging out over the sidewalk that distinguished the pawnshops of his youth.

"It was like a barber's pole once meant a barbershop," he says. "How many of those striped barber's poles do you see nowadays?"



Susan gets blasted!

Randy Price sandblasts away the rust and grime that has built up around Susan Campbell Hall to prepare part of the building for painting.

The University physical plant hired Willamette Valley Sandblasting to strip the fire escapes, metal work, wood trim and some of the brick on three halls at the University. Some ivy was removed which was in the worker's way, but the focus of the effort is peeling paint. Hendricks and Friendly Halls will also be worked on this week.

The sandblasting is part of a budget-restricted effort by the physical plant to maintain the condition of the University's older buildings.

Photo by Elisabeth Podesta