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Music thefts striking a sour note

By Kristin Unwin
Emerald Contributor

"I'm just going to risk it." That is what University sophomore David Keller said after other students' musical instruments began disappearing from lockers in the University School of Music.

Less than a week later, Keller found his own locker broken into and both of his saxophones missing.

"I thought the lock would take care of it," Keller said.

Keller is just one of many victims of a recent rash of thefts that have taken place at the University. In the last seven weeks, eight instruments totaling more than \$16,000 have been taken.

Thieves have also hit Churchill and South Eugene high schools, stealing 14 instruments.

Roughly half of all the instruments were owned by the schools, and the rest belonged to individual students.

All the thefts seem to be related, said Bill Brooks, campus investigator for the Eugene police department.

EPD Detective Dixie Sexton said she has come to the same conclusion based on similarities between the type of property stolen, the type of building where the thefts have taken place, and the method of entry into those buildings.

According to her reports, almost all the property taken has been limited to band instruments, and in each case there has been no sign of forced entry into any of the schools.

Instead, Brooks said, the thieves are either entering the schools unnoticed or are remaining in the buildings until after hours. Once inside, the thieves are taking instruments directly from open classrooms or are cutting the locks off of students' lockers, Brooks said.

Janet Stewart, assistant to the music school dean, said she believes the thieves are professionals.

They seem to know where to look, for only certain lockers have been broken into, and some of the less valuable instruments have been left behind, Stewart said.

"These people are rather bold to come back," Stewart said.

Although none of the instruments has been recovered yet,



Photo by Kim Nguyen
Sophomore David Keller had two saxophones stolen from his locker. He is using a friend's instrument in class.

Brooks said most stolen instruments are taken out of state and sold to music stores or pawn shops.

Therefore, Brooks said the police are alerting area instrument dealers and are entering the stolen instruments' serial numbers into the FBI's National Crime Computer.

The police have no suspects at this time.

Most people affected by the thefts agree that poor security and lack of awareness are to blame.

Richard Long, Fine Arts department leader at South Eugene, said he believes the school's security system is terrible.

"Right now, it's just lip service," Long said.

Long said the system, called Sonitrol, was turned on but wasn't functioning properly when the thefts occurred. In the past the system has even failed to register fires in the building, he said.

Keller said security at the University is lacking but does not think it is realistic to expect changes because of cost.

Carey Drayton, the director of the University Office of Public Safety, agrees that security is lacking but points out that there is only so much his office can do.

Drayton said he could station an officer full-time at the School of Music, but he doesn't believe it will do any good because the officer would not be able to determine who had a right to be in the building.

Instead, Drayton said he and Anne Dhu McLucas, dean of the School of Music, are working together to find more effective ways to improve security

that also takes convenience and cost into consideration.

In doing this, Drayton said he is hoping to strike a balance between "the absolutely Fort Knox situation" and "things walking out the back door, the side door and out the window."

One option is issuing identification cards to all students using the music building. Another is installing an electronic access control system that uses electronic keys instead of standard metal ones.

Stewart said the School of Music has already taken some steps to tighten security but declines to be specific for fear of notifying the thieves of the changes.

Stewart said the school has established a security committee that meets regularly to improve student awareness of campus security.

Stewart said students need to be more careful about where they leave their instruments.

"I want people to be aware — to be watching," Stewart said.

Stewart also encourages students to keep records of their instruments' serial numbers and to report them immediately to the police if their instruments are stolen.

In addition, she urges students to make sure their instruments are properly insured.

Fortunately for Keller, at least one of his saxophones was covered by insurance.

Although Drayton said no one can be completely safe from musical instrument theft, Long offered one solution.

"If it's valuable, don't let it out of your sight," he said.





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