Avoid holiday crime

By JOSIE MUSICO
Staff Writer

This holiday season, make sure your valuable possessions don't become unexpected Christmas gifts for the wrong person.

Local law enforcement warn residents to be extra cautious this time of year, noting that preoccupied holiday shoppers and party-goers can sometimes make easy targets for criminals unwilling to pay for their holiday goodies. And with homes and cars often filled with just-purchased, unwrapped gifts, their easy access could be a thief's dream.

"During the holidays, people are preoccupied with events and may forget to lock their vehicles," said Chief of Police Tony Serbantez.

Officers always advise keeping vehicle doors locked, but wish to offer a special reminder this holiday season. But because some thieves don't mind taking the extra step of breaking a window to enter a locked vehicle, don't leave important items in plain sight in the vehicle, even if it is locked. Hide valuable items under the seat or in the truck, or better yet, take them inside the house with you.

"Be aware of your surroundings while you're out shopping," Serbantez said. "Don't leave valuables in plain view in your vehicle - cover them up."

It could also help to park in well-lighted, heavily-populated areas to deter criminals, who might then feel as if they are being watched. Keep your purse with you at all times while Christmas shopping, never letting it out of sight when an interesting piece of merchandise catches your eye.

Home burglaries can increase as well during the holiday season. As families are away visiting relatives, empty houses can be especially vulnerable to invasions.

Just as you do with your vehicle, lock the doors to your house. And because many burglars will seek entrances other than the front door, don't forget about the back door and all the windows.

Leave your outside lights on while you're away. A well-lit residence can fool burglars into thinking someone might be home, and makes them feel as if they are being watched. And because stacks of newspapers and uncollected mail can alert potential burglars that no one is at home to retrieve them, arrange for someone to collect them for you while you're gone.

The chief also advises not announcing on social-networking sites that you will be away from home, noting that those photos and status updates could be seen by ill-motivated folks eager to take advantage of your empty residence. Instead, wait unitl you return home to show off those Christmas vacation pics and let everyone know how much fun you had.

"Be cautious about what you post on Facebook letting people know you're out of town for the holidays," he said.

The Brownfield Police Department and Terry County Sheriff's Office both offer house-watch programs in which patrol officers or deputies keep a close eye on homes whose residents are away. Notify either law-enforcement agency - depending on whether you live inside city limits or in the county - and tell them your address and what days you will be gone. You might also provide a description of the cars that will be parked at the residence and if any lights will remain on, so they know what to expect and what might be considered out of ordinary.

"They can notify us and tell us when they're going to be gone and when they'll be returning," Serbatez said. "We'll watch their house and look for anything that may be unusual."

If you are interested in the house-watch service, call 637-2511 if you live inside Brownfield or 637-2212 if you reside elsewhere in Terry County.

Brownfield Police Department's Holiday Season Crime Prevention Tips

Tips to prevent home burglaries:
- Have the newspaper and mail held while gone.
- Ask a trusted neighbor to watch your property
- Put padlock on gates
- Set lights and TVs on timers
- If have alarm make sure system is tested
- Report suspicious activity in your neighborhood
- Keep the front of your home well-lit and visible
- Do not display Christmas presents in open view
- Keep record of serial numbers of valuable property to identify in recovery and return to the owner.

Tips to prevent car burglaries:
- Do not leave purses, gifts & other valuables in view
- Place in trunk if possible.
- Park vehicle in lighted area
- Be Aware of your surroundings

The following Terry County 4-H participants competed in the District Food Show Nov. 17 in Levelland: (top row, left to right) Isaiah Millican, Arlie Millican, Katelyn Besler, (front row) Raney Pharis, Amber Kelly and Claudia Musico.

News Briefs

Commissioners - Terry County Commissioners will meet at 10 a.m. Monday, Nov. 26 at City Hall.

School board - Brownfield Independent School District's board of trustees will hold a specially-called meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 26 to consider the retirement of Superintendent Jerry Jones.

Meadow's school board will meet at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 26.

Keep the Cheer Here - The Brownfield Area Chamber of Commerce invites shoppers to "Keep the Cheer Here" from 5-8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29 with extended hours at several local businesses. Santa will be at the Abundant Harvest Collonade that evening for photos with children, and the chamber will be open with cookies and drinks.

Coyote, bobcat calling - The Meadow FFA Booster Club's second annual Coyote and Bobcat Calling Contest will be begin at noon Saturday, Dec. 1. Winners will be announced at 3 p.m. Dec. 2 at West Texas Agriplex, 510 Lubbock Rd., in Meadow. For more information call Patricia England at 407-4227.

Radio fans - If you are interested in joining an antique radio club, contact Stan Baker at 559-4679.

GED classes - Brownfield Independent School District will offer GED classes from 5-9 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at the middle school beginning Nov. 27. For more information call 637-2591.

Tennis - Casual adult tennis matches are held from 7-9 p.m. Mondays at the high school tennis courts. Anyone is welcome. For more information, call Scott Jackson at 637-4547.

Storytime - Kendrick Memorial Library holds Storytime from 10-10:30 a.m. Wednesdays for preschool children ages 2-3. Register at the library, 304 W. Tate St., or call 637-3848.

Donations sought - The Boys and Girls Club of Brownfield is seeking donations of old or new Christmas lights. Take them to 802 E. Cardwell St., or call 893-2842.

Readers - The *Brownfield News* will try to publish information about upcoming nonprofit events that are open to the community. Call Josie with news tips at 637-4535 or email josie@brownfieldonline

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