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Palmetto Bay Issues Holiday Safety Tips

Policing Unit Shares Insights on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Crime During Shopping Season

PALMETTO BAY, Fla., (Nov. 25, 2009) – “Material items can be replaced, but your life cannot be.” This is just one of many helpful shopping safety tips shared by Palmetto Bay Mayor Eugene Flinn and Policing Unit Commander Gregory Truitt in advance of busy holiday season in the major shopping districts of South Miami-Dade County.

Shopping during the holidays can present unique dangers, says Mayor Flinn. “By taking a few preventive steps, you can keep the season joyous and crime free – starting first with a simple rule: ‘Don’t put up a fight if you are being robbed’.”

Commander Truitt echoed the Mayor by adding, “The holiday season is a time when busy people can become careless and vulnerable to theft and other holiday crime.” The following tips from the Miami-Dade Police Department’s Village of Palmetto Bay Policing Unit can help you be more careful, prepared and aware during the holiday season:

- When possible, shop during daylight hours. If you must shop at night, go with a friend or family member. Always let someone know where you’re going and when you expect to return;
- Dress casually and comfortably;
- Avoid wearing expensive jewelry;
- Do not carry a purse or wallet, if possible;
- Start your shopping day with a full tank of gas, which should keep you from having to make an unscheduled stop;
- Always carry your Florida Driver License or Identification Card along with necessary cash, checks and/or a credit card you expect to use;
- You may be rushed and thinking about a thousand things, but stay alert to your surroundings;
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash;
- Pay for purchases with a check or credit card when possible. Use Travelers checks, if they are lost or stolen, they can be replaced;
- Notify the credit card issuer immediately if your credit card is lost, stolen or misused; Keep a record of all of your credit card numbers in a safe place at home;
- Beware of strangers approaching you for any reason, because at this time of year, con-artists, and professional pick pockets may try various methods of distracting you with the intention of taking your money or belongings. Usually one person will distract you (ask you about a product or garment), while the other removes contents from your purse or shopping bag. Another method is "crowding" this occurs in-between the racks of clothes, two or more people will crowd in close to you and again remove items from your shopping bags or purse;
- Avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion to avoid mishaps;
- If you carry a wallet or purse, keep in mind, these are prime targets of criminals in crowded shopping areas, transportation terminals, and on buses and other forms of mass transit;

- Keep cash in your front pocket;
- Most malls and major department stores have security guards or hire off duty police officers. You can always ask for an escort to your vehicle;
- If you have made a large purchase (computer or jewelry) take a minute to look around you before you get into your vehicle. Criminals in the past have slashed tires on vehicles and when the driver got out to fix the flat they were robbed;
- Have your vehicle keys in your hand ready to enter your vehicle. Don't get distracted looking for your keys;
- Always place items in your trunk, if this is not possible bring a towel or blanket with you to cover up your purchases (out of sight out of mind);
- If you do go home after shopping beware of cars following you. If you believe a car is following, immediately call 911, and stay on main roads (US-1, Kendall Dr., I-95);
- If you are hosting a holiday party at your residence, be aware of who your guests are, and who your guests may have invited;
- When the holidays are over try not to put out empty cardboard boxes for trash pickup advertising to the criminals what you purchased. If possible bag up all empty boxes;
- If Possible, leave small children at home with a family member or trusted babysitter;
- Teach your child to go to a store clerk and ask for help in case they are separated from you;
- Teach children to stay close to you at all times while shopping;
- Never allow children to make unaccompanied trips to the restroom;
- Children should never be allowed to go to the car alone and they should never be left alone in the car even if it "only for a minute;"
- Teach children their full name, address, and telephone number to give to the police officers or mall security;
- Teach children to immediately inform you if a stranger is bothering them.

If you have any questions regarding these Holiday Safety Tips or for general information, please call the **Village of Palmetto Bay Policing Unit's** non-emergency line at 305-259-1270. For emergencies, dial 9-1-1.

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*Incorporated in 2002, **The Village of Palmetto Bay** is a vibrant community of 25,000 residents nestled between Biscayne Bay and So. Dixie Highway, about 15 miles south of downtown Miami. The Village is governed by a five-member Council and operates under a Council-Manager form of government. Dubbed "The Village of Parks," Palmetto Bay offers an extensive system of attractive parks, unique recreational opportunities, and bay access. It also is home to several excellent public schools, and a robust commercial corridor along Dixie Highway offering a diverse range of restaurants, markets, and lodging. Specifically, the Village extends from the centerline of SW 136 St., south to the centerline of SW 184 St., expanding west to the centerline of South Dixie Highway (including the center island), and east to Biscayne Bay. Visit us at www.palmettobay-fl.gov.*