

# LOCAL

# COMMUNITY NEWS ROUNDTOP

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# Robbers target 24-hour stores

## Walgreens and CVS stores are on every street corner, so they become the new 7-Eleven of choice for robberies.

BY ANDREW TRAN  
STAFF WRITER

Samantha Doman could have gone shopping for a recordable compact disc any time.

She chose the early morning of June 5, a decision she regretted when armed robbers burst into the 24-hour Fort Lauderdale pharmacy and threatened to shoot her if she didn't turn over her wallet.

"Why," thought the 20-year-old art

student, "didn't I just wait until later?"

All-night drugstores offer the convenience of anytime shopping, but the recent arrests of three robbery suspects show they also provide a temptation for criminals looking for easy money. Lack of staff, lack of traffic, and multiple cash registers combine to create an attractive target.

"Society's needs have changed, so stores have adapted — and with any adaptation, there are difficulties, such

as the increased potential for criminal activity," said Bob Preziosi, a business professor at Nova Southeastern University.

As long as there is a demand, as long as people want a pack of cigarettes or need bandages early in the morning, stores will be open to sell them, he said.

It would make life easier for law enforcement officers if there were no stores open after midnight and "it

would be more convenient if people didn't commit any crimes at all — but neither is likely," said Keyta Conception, a spokeswoman for the Broward Sheriff's Office.

As the pharmacy robberies grew in range and frequency, the Broward Sheriff's Office increased patrols and implemented special operations that officials still feel uncomfortable re-

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oward Sheriff's Office Lt. Bill Wesolowski

# Security measures, Police tactics change

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realizing after three suspects had been arrested.

"The tactics we used could still work on future crime waves, so it would not be wise to put all the cards on the table," Concepcion said.

The drugstore robberies follow previous robbery trends in Broward County at pizzerias and Chinese restaurants, Broward Sheriff Al Lambert said Monday during a news conference announcing the arrests of Timothy Johnson, 34, Gerald Joshua, 27, and Delrick Johnson, 21, all of Pompano Beach.

The three men were responsible for 13 pharmacy robberies, he said.

"It's probably a comfort level," he said. "It works once, they'll do it again — till we catch them."

Many pharmacy buildings stand alone, close to major roads that can be used for easy escape, said Lt. Bill Wesolow-

ski of the Sheriff's Office's robbery division.

"Walgreens and CVS stores are on every street corner, so they become the new 7-Eleven of choice for robberies," he said.

About 25 percent of Walgreens pharmacies are open 24 hours, said Carol Hively, a spokeswoman for the company.

Michael DeAngelis, a spokesman for CVS, said the company looks at the overall number of stores in a market and its population to help determine how many 24-hour stores are appropriate.

Hively and DeAngelis declined to elaborate on security measures recently implemented by their stores after the string of robberies in South Florida.

But in the past few months, new outdoor security cameras with blinking lights that can be seen from across streets were hanging above several stores, including the Walgreens drug store where Doman was robbed.

Newer and more security cameras are one way to deter criminals, Preziosi said. Other ways include restricting access by installing a drive-through window or hiring a security guard.

"A guard is the best deterrent, who serves as a signal," he said. "Unfortunately, there's so much pressure these days to make more and more profit that sometimes companies might wait a little long before doing something for the store that will make it safer."

Doman said she still gets scared every time she visits a drugstore.

"I have to bring a friend and try not to go late at night," she said. "I get uncomfortable, uneasy — I don't know when something like this is going to happen again."

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