

Stay Safe While Playing Santa

BY LIZ GOFF

It's that time of year when lights twinkle and bells jingle, and we head out to shop for holiday gifts. But remember, behind every "Ho! Ho! Ho!" there's a thief, a rip-off artist, or a small time thug waiting to fill his stocking by emptying your pockets.

It's sad, but true. Crime and criminals don't take a holiday, especially at this time of year, when frenzied shoppers fill the malls—which is precisely why police in Queens have beefed up patrols for the holiday season.

Police officials warn that most criminals are opportunists who take advantage of situations that are presented to them. They said the key to crime prevention during the holiday season is to remove opportunities for crimes to occur.

Police offer the following tips:

- **On The Street:** Stay aware and use your head when shopping or traveling in holiday crowds. Be alert. Don't be afraid, but look around you occasionally to see what is going on. Be determined, careful. Travel and shop with companions whenever possible during the daytime, and especially at night. Remember, there is safety in numbers.

- **Plan ahead.** Know where you are going, know which stores stay open late at night, and do not venture into strange or unfamiliar neighborhoods at night.

- **Don't put all your eggs in one bas-**

ket. When leaving home, take along only the cash or credit cards you need. Divide valuables among your pockets, purse, or wallet. Some people hide a small amount of cash in their clothing to use in an emergency, to get home, or to get help.

- **Try to keep your keys separate from your purse or wallet.** Keys "found" by thieves with your identification on them often lead to more problems, including home burglaries, police said.

- **Don't carry a shoulder bag while shopping in holiday crowds.** It's too easy to grab and run. Carry a bag with a short handle, or tuck your bag close to your body. You might even wear your bag inside your jacket or coat. But at any rate, don't make your bag an easy target for thieves on the prowl.

- **Don't carry your purse or shopping bags around your wrist.** A sly purse-snatcher could pull you and the bags to the ground. Never, ever place handbags on the floor in restaurants or restrooms, or hang them from the side of a chair. Do not put your bag down while you are selecting merchandise, and never leave your bag unattended in a store dressing room.

- **To help foil would-be purse-snatchers, carry your bag upside-down, with your hand on the latch or zipper.** If a thief tries to snatch it, open the bag and let the contents fall to the floor. Most criminals are completely confused by this, police said. They don't generally stick

around to watch a crowd gather around you.

- **If you feel uncomfortable in a holiday crowd, or if you sense that you are being watched or followed, seek help immediately.** Remember, people have been seriously injured, and worse, trying to fight off purse-snatchers, police said. Is it worth being injured to protect what you are carrying?

In this new millennium, an age of possible terrorist activity, shoppers should remain aware of their surroundings, police said. If you see a bag or package left unattended, DO NOT attempt to open it to check on its contents. Call 911 or mall security personnel, alert them to the location of the package, and stay away, police said.

- Be aware of threatening or suspicious activity by people around you. If you see a suspicious person, or someone acting in a threatening or suspicious way, call 911 or alert mall security. DO NOT attempt to confront the person. Watch, listen, take action and stand away, police said. Let trained responders handle the situation.

Scams: Don't think for a moment that con artists haven't dreamed up some scams to lure holiday shoppers to take the bait, police said. Cops advise shoppers to be educated consumers. Look for NYC Department of Consumer Affairs licenses when making purchases from street ven-

dors. Remember, a Rolex watch that sells for \$5, \$10 or \$20 is not a Rolex. Don't be duped, police said. A box containing merchandise like a DVD or CD player may look like a bargain at \$40 or \$50 on the street. But when you open the "factory-sealed" box at home, it may be filled with bricks. And then just try to find that vendor!

Today's scam artists have perfected the act of the scam, police said. They often work in teams to swindle you out of your cash or plastic, stealing away your holiday. Remember, if the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Police suggest you stick to the following rules for a scam-free holiday season:

- Be wary of door-to-door salesmen
- Don't be pressured or bullied into quick purchases by high-pressure sales "pitchmen"

- Remember, con artists will try to convince you that they're on the up-and-up. They may look innocent enough. They may even offer merchandise that looks too good to pass up. But it's all a ploy. They look friendly to gain your confidence so they can pull the wool over your eyes.

- Be aware of parking lots scams, police said. Thieves will often approach a woman alone in a car and tell her she has a flat tire, an oil leak or recent vehicle

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Where Every Holiday List has a Happy Ending!

**Holiday Festivities at
The Bay Terrace**

Sat. & Sun. December 9 & 10 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Photos with Santa & Elf
Plus: Sun. 10:30a-4:30p Horse & Buggy Rides

Sat. & Sun. December 16 & 17 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Photos with Santa & Elf
Plus: Sun. 10:30a-4:30p Horse & Buggy Rides

Sun. December 17 • approx. 5pm
Menorah & Tree Lighting Ceremony

Sat. December 23, 2006 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Photos with Santa & Elf

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