

Burglary, vandalism mar holidays at 3 schools

By John T. Stephens III
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The Grinch Who Stole Christmas was afoot during the holidays as heartless criminals broke into three West Las Vegas elementary schools.

Burglars and vandals held Booker Elementary, 227 N. MLK Blvd., Matt Kelley, 1900 N. "J" St., and Mabel Hoggard, 950 N. Tonopah Dr. under siege. In the grips of a crime spree, the three schools have lost thousands of dollars worth of equipment and resources.

Burglars pilfered VCRs, TVs, cassette players, tapes, books, other learning materials and a microwave from Booker on Jan. 4. Thieves broke into Kelley during the Christmas holiday and stole electric equipment, and used a pick to break through classroom walls. Although perpetrators didn't break into Hoggard, the greenhouse at the school was trashed by vandals during the break.

"With the nation being in the computer age, schools now have computers, TVs and VCRs in the classrooms," said Sgt. Ken Young, supervisor of the Clark County School District's elementary police division, "These items are commonly stolen because they can be sold."

There were 380 burglaries in the school district last year. Booker was hit seven times.



Booker principal Beverly Mathis shows off security equipment to help deter future burglaries at the West Las Vegas elementary school.

Of the 103 CCSD police officers, six are assigned to primary response for elementary schools.

It'd been three years since Kelley had been burglarized, principal Jeremy Hauser said. The video recorders and televisions were painted orange to discourage theft.

"It's difficult for people to feel comfortable and bring their belongings to work," said Hauser.

Hoggard, a magnet school for math and science, had its greenhouse vandalized.

"The building itself was not broken into," said principal Bill Evans, adding that only potted plants were knocked over and damaged. "In the six years I've been here this is the first time this has happened."

Sgt. Young said that burglaries don't just happen in West Las Vegas but in "Green Valley, Summerlin and Blue Diamond. It

happens everywhere." "It's not a major problem, but it is a minimal problem that we have to deal with," said Ray Willis, public information director for the school district. "As the (school) district grows we are challenged to keep up with the growth. With growth in the urban community we try to keep the schools as burglar proof as possible."

School district officials said all schools have alarms and cameras to protect campuses. Security systems at the three elementary schools will be enhanced and nightly patrols beefed up.

Fortunately, local businesses have come to the aid of the schools. Circus Circus Enterprises donated TVs, Southwest Gas Corp. donated VCRs, HUD gave computers and Seven Seas sent money to replace lost property. Assemblywoman Barbara Cegavke gave money to Hoggard and Pat Krom, an area businesswoman lent her skills and assisted in the cleanup of the greenhouse. Big Mac, a radio DJ on KCEP-FM 88.1 held a public forum on his show to heighten awareness of the theft problem.

"The community response has been wonderful," Booker principal Beverly Mathis said. "This negative situation has been turned into something positive by showing the children that the community does care about their education."

Seven excused from jury pool in dragging case in Texas

JASPER, Texas (AP) — A prospective juror in the trial of a white man accused of dragging a black man to death was excused Tuesday after revealing a relative received letters from the defendant laced with racist remarks.

Donald Halmon, a middle-aged construction worker, was one of seven people released from jury service in

the murder trial of John William King, the first of three white men to be tried in the June 7 slaying of James Byrd Jr.

King, Shawn Allen Berry and Lawrence Russell Brewer are accused of killing Byrd, 49, because he was black. The men allegedly beat him, chained him to a pickup truck and dragged him for 2

1/2 miles, tearing his right arm and head from his body.

Halmon told attorneys his step-granddaughter, Michelle Chapman, received letters from King that espoused anti-black views.

Chapman is one of 53 people subpoenaed as potential witnesses in the trial.

Chapman is one of several girls King contacted by letter

while he was imprisoned from 1995 to 1997 for violating probation in a 1992 burglary, authorities said.

The contents of the letters have not been disclosed, but authorities characterized them as being romantic in nature, a series of come-ons to girls King was acquainted with in Jasper before he was sent to prison. They contain

details of his pro-Aryan, anti-black beliefs, authorities said.

A week after Byrd's mangled body was found, several of the girls' parents turned over the letters to investigators, District Attorney Guy James Gray said. The letters may be introduced as evidence in King's trial.

Defense attorney Haden

"Sonny" Cribbs had Halmon dismissed based on his vacillating opinion about whether he could keep his preconceived ideas about King's guilt from influencing his verdict.

Seven of 10 potential jurors interviewed Tuesday were excused. Four were struck because they said they (See Dragging, Page 3)

Baptist president accused of diverting funds to finance lifestyle

LARGO, Fla. (AP) — When the Rev. Henry Lyons accepted a \$225,000 check to rebuild burned black churches, he sunk \$60,000 in his savings account and spent part of the money to redecorate his house and pay off bills, prosecutors said.

Lyons had told the Anti-Defamation League the money would go immediately to "the wheels that are squeaking the loudest." But prosecutors said he gave \$12,000 to his wife, and sent money to love interests in Tennessee and Indiana.

"Rev. Lyons made it seem there was an urgency to this ... He indicated there were some churches that needed instruments of worship — pews and Bibles," Amy Goldstein, former assistant director of national leadership for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, testified Tuesday.

"It seemed to me they were in desperate need and the

money would be disbursed immediately."

Lyons, president of the National Baptist Convention USA, is charged with racketeering and grand theft, accused of swindling money

from corporations seeking to do business with the convention and stealing the ADL funds intended to rebuild churches.

Mark Medin, the ADL's director of national

leadership, said the organization's leaders first began questioning where the money went when they received telephone calls from reporters in the St. Petersburg area after prosecutors began

investigating Lyons' finances.

Lyons accepted the \$225,000 check at the ADL's annual meeting in New York City in 1996, where he introduced three ministers

from rural and impoverished burned churches.

Prosecutors say Lyons actually had distributed less than \$40,000 to burned churches — \$10,000 each to (See Lyons, Page 6)

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