

Gun shop owners bearing arms in wake of thieves

Recent area crime spree has left some nervous about the security of their stores

Wednesday, December 8, 2004

By Joe Snapper

TIMES NEWS SERVICE

ST CHARLES - Sue Bare is packing heat.

All her employees are, too, every minute of every day.

So goes workplace safety for the St. Charles gun seller as a squad of armed bandits pillaging northern mid-Michigan firearms shops pull job after job, each more brazen than the last.

"There's times I would get comfortable and not feel I have to carry all the time," said Bare, owner of Bare's, a shooting sports retailer in Saginaw County. "Now I'm carrying all the time."

Chances are, a gang of burglars police say have broken into gun shops after hours in three counties - including Midland County on Monday - aren't striving to arm a militia.

But they could. The one-month total: 41 guns and counting, police say.

Gun shop owners across the region are battening down the hatches, they said, amid police urgings of tighter security.

Police suspect the guns end up on the black market.

"They wind up in the hands of criminals," said Thomas Brandon, the No. 2

statewide enforcement agent in the Detroit office of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, which is joining local agencies in the hunt.

Thefts from Bay, Midland and Arenac counties include dozens of pistols, some unfit to arm any criminal except a poacher. One handgun weighed 5 pounds and is popular for bear hunting.

"There's nothing in North America it can't handle," said Thomas L. Heritier, a Saginaw police firearms trainer, referring to a stolen .50-caliber Smith & Wesson, which has an 8-inch barrel that fires bullets the size of a pinky finger. Each round costs \$1.50.

"That's a lot of iron," he added. "It would be almost impossible (for a criminal) to carry." The day after Thanksgiving, the bandits shotgunned their way into Frank's Great Outdoors in Linwood and made off with 26 guns.

Sixteen days earlier, they broke into an Arenac County tackle shop and stole six pistols, but they left six shotguns behind. They came back for those a week later, police say.

"These guys are brave," said Glen C. Duncan, owner of Duncan's Sport Shop in Bay City. "The scary thing about this group is they're shooting doors. What's the next step? That's rough when they play that game."

Monday, police said the same crew may have stormed the Joe Gun gun shop near Sanford in Midland County, pilfering three weapons worth \$1,500.

The spate of thefts is stoking anxiety for gun store owners, who are well aware their merchandise is as good as cash.

"Guns by their nature are easy to move, easy to fence," said Lt. Bob Clayton, a sheriff's deputy from Ogemaw County, where police said the thieves hit a West Branch jeweler within hours of a tackle store heist.

The violence also comes as bank robberies are on the rise, both in number and frequency of armed heists, Duncan said.

"It just bothers the devil out of anybody who's in business," he said.

Duncan refused to discuss the extra precautions he's taken, but he said police have visited gun shops across mid-Michigan urging extra security and asking owners to keep a lookout for unusual customers.

Sue Bare said that besides keeping all workers armed all the time, the store this week has added extra security cameras and alarms.

She's careful from experience. In 1990, a Detroit bunch stole 203 guns from her shop, just a year after opening. It took police four years to retrieve all but a couple dozen, she said.

Last April, two men axed their way into Dick Williams Gun Shop in Saginaw County's Spaulding Township. They grabbed a display case stuffed with weapons. As they ran, the firearms slid out. They ended up with just two pistols.

Since January, thieves have ripped off 333 guns statewide, said Brandon, the ATF assistant special agent. He wasn't sure how that compares with past years or how many guns police have recovered.

But the path of a stolen gun is dangerously clear.

Just a day after an August heist of 92 guns in Inkster, a criminal bought one. Within a month of a 2002 fatal heist in Lapeer County - in which a shop owner was fatally shot - one of the guns fueled a shoot-out with state police in Isabella County, Brandon said.

His agents spend 70 percent of their resources on violent crime, including thefts of guns, he said.

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end up with them and they are used for more violence," he said.

Posted: 12/11/2004 2:28:36 PM EDT

Comments:

Quoted:... the path of a stolen gun is dangerously clear.

"They enter the market illegally, and usually felons or violent criminals end up with them and they are used for more violence," ATF Special Agent Brandon said.

Steal um in MI sell um in WA, Steal um in WA sell um in MI. Nothing new the Kehoe's and Neo-Nazi criminal gun stealing gangs etc have been doing it for years, easy money. Makes ya think about those parking lot/newspaper guns ya see for sale 🤖

Posted: 12/11/2004 1:49:20 PM EDT

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They killed the owner and robbed the place and set the store on fire. 40 guns were taken in August and they have recovered only one. Inside job is what they are thinking.

TEEN GETS LIFE IN PRISON IN MURDER OF INKSTER GUN DEALER This is a follow up to the February 2005 FFL Newsletter article "Arrest Made In Murder Of Inkster Gun Dealer." On March 18, 2005, Anthony Field was found guilty of first-degree murder and arson for the arson/homicide of FFL Clyde Alexander, d/b/a Alexander's Sport Shop in Inkster, Michigan. FFL Alexander was killed on August 3, 2004, when a fire occurred at his place of business. He had been beaten and bound and subsequently died from smoke inhalation. Over 90 firearms were taken from the business. ATF assisted with the investigation by conducting interviews, surveillances, polygraph examinations, arrest warrants, Federal grand jury subpoenas as well as the cause and origin examination of the scene.