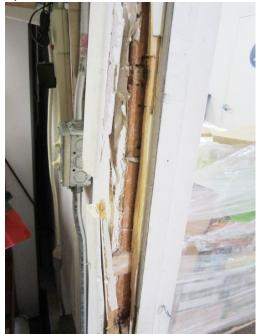


Published March 16th, 2022

Rheem Shopping Center businesses burglarized under puzzling circumstances

By Vera Kochan



Thieves gained entry by forcing open Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe's rear door. Photo Vera Kochan

found in a gutter in San Rafael."

Seven offices or businesses situated along Rheem Boulevard in the Rheem Shopping Center experienced burglaries within moments of each other, either late evening on Feb. 17 or early morning Feb. 18. According to the Moraga Police Department, reports were received of the incidents on Feb. 18, and police responded to discover that while seven businesses were broken into, only three had items missing. MPD proceeded to notify other law enforcement agencies in the area.

Rheem Valley Pet Shoppe owner Jennifer Lenfestey seemingly had the most puzzling break-in of all seven businesses. "They somehow kicked or punched in the back door and stole my cash, checkbook and electric key fob that allows me to run the software."

That's not the odd part of the burglary. Lenfestey made a unique discovery in the shop's recycle bin. The thief/thieves had placed into the bin stacks of mail and check registers from the other burgled businesses along with a brown manila envelop labeled "Sam" containing more than 10 black and white or color family photos. The pictures all had dates from between 1961-1970, along with handwritten captions on the back of each describing the photo's scenario. The name "Sam" was written on several of the pictures.

Stranger still, Lenfestey replied, "I got a call just days after the burglary telling me that two of my checks were

The Moraga Chamber of Commerce was another office that was burgled. During the March 9 town council meeting, Council Member Mike McCluer reported, "I attended the Chamber of Commerce board meeting. They had a robbery in their office in Rheem. Their office was ransacked. Their laptop was stolen; the checkbook was stolen, so they were scrambling to get the checks changed and stop orders and signature cards, so it's been difficult."

A few days following the burglaries, Lafayette Police served a search warrant in Concord related to burglaries that had occurred in Lafayette on Feb. 13, according to MPD Chief Jon King. "During the service of that search warrant, property from several burglaries, including the ones in Moraga on Feb. 18, were recovered.

"Additionally," King added, "a subject at the location was arrested for a burglary warrant that was obtained by Moraga Police for an incident that occurred on Jan. 28." All of the burglary cases from both Feb. 18 and Jan. 28 have been submitted to the Contra Costa County District Attorney's office for review and charging.

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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