

Theft of books at Collier on the rise

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At 8:30 p.m. on Nov. 15, 1994, a 22 year-old Florence man entered Collier library for a little light reading, and decided that the books he found there needed to become part of his personal collection.

Aware of the efforts UNA has taken to reduce pilferage of its collection, the man carefully removed the bar code identification strips on the front cover of each book, placed the three items he had chosen in a book bag, and walked calmly through the alarm scanner and toward the front door of Collier.

A loud buzz immediately alerted librarians of the attempted theft, and the man, stunned by the buzzer and blur of commotion, handed his loot to the librarians without much discussion.

The man waited patiently as Public Safety was called, and upon arrival the investigating officer asked to see the man's student I.D. The man assured the officer that his I.D. was in his car, and that he had only taken the volumes so he could save a few steps. His intentions were to return the books the next day.

The officer escorted the man to his car, where he simply entered the vehicle, started the engine and attempted to drive away. The investigator quickly shifted gears and became an arresting officer, and the man was taken into custody, locked in the Florence/Lauderdale County Detention Center, and charged with third degree theft of property. It was later determined that the man was not a student at UNA.

Thefts at Collier Library seem to be on the rise, according to Dr. Garry Warren, dean of information technologies, but it may just be that more people are getting caught.

"We had 18 people get caught last term, and obviously it happened more often than that, but that is just how many were caught," Warren said.

Warren indicated that much more property is actually stolen from Collier than is recovered through normal detection methods, but every measure possible short of closing the collection to the public is being taken to protect its safety.

"We have a bad problem with people cutting articles and pictures out of periodicals. I would say that nine times out of 10, if a student is looking for articles in the bound journals in the periodical section, that they would have trouble locating something they

needed as a result of some form of theft or vandalism," Warren said.

Warren said that it can be difficult to keep up with a collection the size of Collier's and catching attempted thieves is more luck than science.

"We try to give students the benefit of the doubt. It is easy to get a periodical or book that belongs to the library mixed in with your personal belongings and set off the alarm when trying to leave. But it gets pretty difficult when the person we catch has defaced the property, or torn pages out, in an obvious attempt to fool the security system," Warren said.

According to Grace Simpson, Circulation Supervisor at Collier, the library was only able to catch about half-a-dozen would be pilfers each semester, and that the 18 caught over the fall semester

was unusually high.

"Of the 18, 14 were UNA students, three were local high students, and one was an outside person. The majority of them were cases of periodicals that were either taken completely, or they had pages torn out of the magazine. But there seemed to be an extremely large rash of them last semester, and most of them were students," Simpson said.

Simpson said that the university does not inventory the library's vast collection each year. Instead, she said that the process of inventory is ongoing and starts over again about every three years. She indicated that the number of volumes found missing because of theft each year would not be an accurate example of what is actually missing, but only what is missing from the portion

inventoried during that particular year.

Wayne O'Neal, Acquisitions and Periodicals Supervisor at Collier said that the university replaced 119 volumes that were found missing last year due to theft. The cost of this replacement has begun to add up, O'Neal indicated.

"The cost of replacing an average volume is \$43. That doesn't include the cost of the labor involved in preparing that book for the collection and re-shelving it. These were books that we know about and were able to replace. Many of the books that are stolen we are unable to replace because they are no longer in print," O'Neal said.

O'Neal said that Collier adds four to five thousand new volumes each year to its collection, which

currently includes over 300,000 titles and over 1,200 periodical subscriptions, and that more books could be added if it weren't for the need to replace volumes that are stolen.

In 1988, according to Warren, the university installed a security system to warn librarians that books were in danger of being taken. The detectors at the doors, that everyone must use to enter or exit the library, react to a magnetically charged device hidden somewhere in the book or periodical. The devices are hidden in such a way that only someone who knew what he or she was looking for could find them, and then the device cannot be removed without doing extensive damage to the book or periodical it is attached to.

Warren said that certain would be thieves have gone to great lengths to avoid detection only to be caught in the end.

"We have had people tear the bar code tags off the front cover thinking that's where the device is.

They have removed the card pockets, call numbers and actually done quite a bit of damage to some books looking for the device. We have even seen some people tear pages out of a magazine in order to avoid detection, and get caught because they stole the page that the device was attached to and they didn't even know it," Warren said.

Warren did say, however, that students are not dealt with the same way non-students are when dealing with an attempted book theft.

Director of public safety, Rich Deter, said that the school's stance on the prosecution of would be literature lifters goes as far as its jurisdiction, and he said that he feels the policy is just as tough for students; if not more so.

"If a non-student tries to steal a book, and gets caught, then the only jurisdiction the university has over that individual is through regular legal channels. We may get a prosecution for theft, which is tough enough, but our chances of recovering restitution for the cost of the theft or vandalism become slight after that. If a student gets caught, however, then an automatic fine of \$30, per item tampered with, will be placed on the financial hold records of that student. After that, the student is turned over to Dr. Baird, and the whole thing goes through regular disciplinary actions," Deter said.

According to Deter, this type of corrective action is better for the university because it not only acts as a deterrent to theft, but also gives the university a channel of recovery for the cost of theft and vandalism.

Champions on parade



THE NATIONAL CHAMPION UNA LIONS were honored Saturday, Jan. 21, with a parade through the streets of downtown Florence. The Lions then congregated in Flowers Hall for the afternoon to display the trophy, sign autographs and meet the fans. (Photo by Chris Rohling)