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N e w s R e l e a s e

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Sheriff Champagne Warns Holiday Shoppers, "Think Personal Safety First!"

November 23, the day after Thanksgiving, kicked off the biggest shopping day of the year for retail sales. And with shoppers out looking for deals, this Christmas holiday shopping season promises to be as busy as ever. I would urge shoppers to keep some basic safety precautions when shopping.

"Don't become so preoccupied with the thrill and excitement of shopping and holiday festivities that you lose your sense of good judgment when it comes to your personal safety," warns Sheriff Champagne. "Remember this is also a time when criminals work overtime to take advantage of innocent, law abiding people. They prey upon larger crowds and extended store hours. This, combined with all the distractions related to shopping, creates the perfect setting for petty thieves and criminal types."

Sheriff Champagne strongly advises shoppers to think 'safety first' before they embark on this year's shopping excursions. Although security measures are being heightened to protect shoppers across the country, he is warning St. Charles Parish residents to keep their guard up to avoid becoming one of the millions of people victimized by crime each year.

And how do we go about protecting ourselves during this holiday shopping season? Sheriff Champagne advises busy shoppers that they can take some safety precautions to reduce their chances of being victimized by the likes of those criminals who thrive on shoppers at this time of the year. Holiday shopping precautions include:

- Always try to shop with another person. A single shopper is the ultimate target for theft.
- When going shopping, make sure you tell someone where you are going and what time you expect to return home.
- Plan ahead. If you know you are going to return to your car after nightfall, park in a well lit area. Note your parking place. Parking lots have a tendency to look very different as cars come and go.
- Be alert to the possibility that a thief may be following you looking for an opportunity to steal your belongings. If so, locate a store employee or security

personnel. Be prepared to give them a complete description of the person you suspect.

- If carrying cash, keep it in a front pocket. This makes it more difficult for a pickpocket to remove.
- Store keys in a pants or jacket pocket. If your purse is stolen, you will still be able to drive home.
- Take only one or two credit cards and a couple of checks with you, rather than a bulky purse.
- Make a list of all credit card numbers and the numbers to call in case they are lost or stolen. This will make the incident a lot easier to report.
- If you feel uneasy returning to your car alone, find a security guard and ask him to walk you to your car.
- When returning to your car, check around it and in the back seat.
- Have your car keys in your hand to avoid spending unnecessary time unprotected from the security of your vehicle.
- After the holiday, consider throwing the discarded packaging and boxes into one of the recycling bins around located around the parish rather, than leaving it on your curb. This will remove a clue to would-be burglars about gifts you have received.

The recycling bins are located at the east and west bank bridge parks, as well as other locations. See the parish web site for details about locations and the types of materials accepted for recycling.

Sheriff Champagne concluded, "Don't let some would-be criminal take the joy out of your holiday. Remember, by taking a few simple precautions, you can reduce or eliminate your potential for becoming a victim of holiday crime. Have a safe and happy Christmas."