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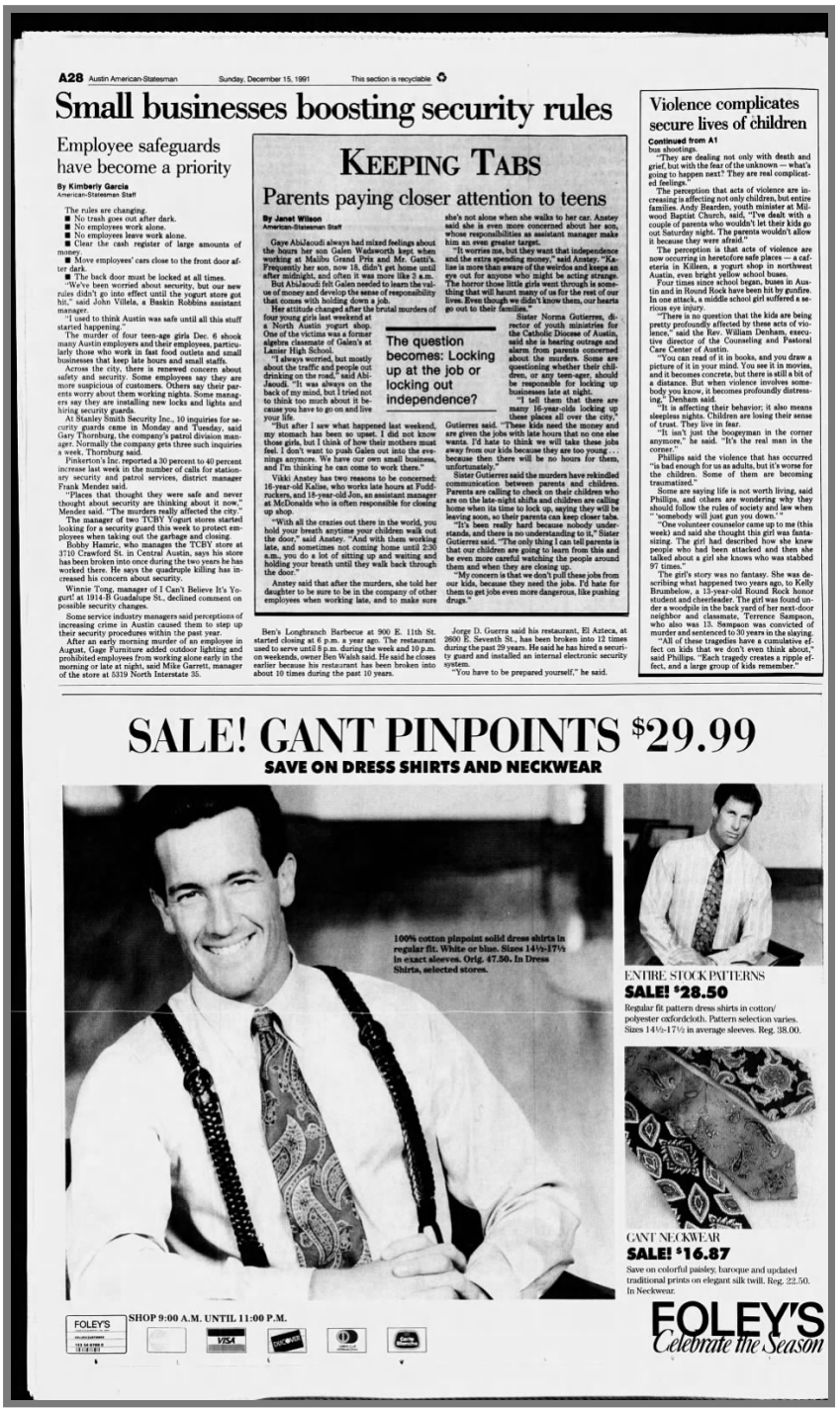

Small businesses boosting security rules

Employee safeguards have become a priority

By Kimberly Garcia
American-Statesman Staff

The rules are changing.
- No trash goes out after dark.
- No employees work alone.
- No employees leave work alone.
- Clear the cash register of large amounts of money.
- Move employees' cars close to the front door after dark.
- The back door must be locked at all times.

"We've been worried about security, but our new rules didn't go into effect until the yogurt store got hit," said John Villela, a Baskin Robbins assistant manager.

"I used to think Austin was safe until all this stuff started happening."

The murder of four teen-age girls Dec. 6 shook many Austin employers and their employees, particularly those who work in fast food outlets and small businesses that keep late hours and small staffs.

Across the city, there is renewed concern about safety and security. Some employees say they are more suspicious of customers. Others say their parents worry about them working nights. Some managers say they are installing new locks and lights and hiring security guards.

At Stanley Smith Security Inc., 10 inquiries for security guards came in Monday and Tuesday, said Gary Thornburg, the company's patrol division manager. Normally the company gets three such inquiries a week, Thornburg said.

Pinkerton's Inc. reported a 30 percent to 40 percent increase last week in the number of calls for stationary security and patrol services, district manager Frank Mendez said.

"Places that thought they were safe and never thought about security are thinking about it now," Mendez said. "The murders really affected the city."

The manager of two TCBY Yogurt stores started looking for a security guard this week to protect employees when taking out the garbage and closing.

Bobby Hamric, who manages the TCBY store at 3710 Crawford St. in Central Austin, says his store has been broken into once during the two years he has worked there. He says the quadruple killing has increased his concern about security.

Winnie Tong, manager of I Can't Believe It's Yogurt! at 1914-B Guadalupe St., declined comment on possible security changes.

Some service industry managers said perceptions of increasing crime in Austin caused them to step up their security procedures within the past year.

After an early morning murder of an employee in August, Gage Furniture added outdoor lighting and prohibited employees from working alone early in the morning or late at night, said Mike Garrett, manager of the store at 5319 North Interstate 35.

KEEPING TABS

Parents paying closer attention to teens

By Janet Wilson
American-Statesman Staff

Gaye Abi-Jaoudi always had mixed feelings about the hours her son Galen Wadsworth kept when working at Malibu Grand Prix and Mr. Gatti's. Frequently her son, now 18, didn't get home until after midnight, and often it was more like 3 a.m.

But Abi-Jaoudi felt Galen needed to learn the value of money and develop the sense of responsibility that comes with holding down a job.

Her attitude changed after the brutal murders of four young girls last weekend at a North Austin yogurt shop. One of the victims was a former algebra classmate of Galen's at Lanier High School.

"I always worried, but mostly about the traffic and people out drinking on the road," said Abi-Jaoudi. "It was always on the back of my mind, but I tried not to think too much about it because you have to go on and live your life.

The question becomes: Locking up at the job or locking out independence?

"But after I saw what happened last weekend, my stomach has been so upset. I did not know those girls, but I think of how their mothers must feel. I don't want to push Galen out into the evenings anymore. We have our own small business, and I'm thinking he can come to work there."

Vikki Anstey has two reasons to be concerned: 16-year-old Kalise, who works late hours at Fuddruckers, and 18-year-old Jon, an assistant manager at McDonalds who is often responsible for closing up shop.

"With all the crazies out there in the world, you hold your breath anytime your children walk out the door," said Anstey. "And with them working late, and sometimes not coming home until 2:30 a.m., you do a lot of sitting up and waiting and holding your breath until they walk back through the door."

Anstey said that after the murders, she told her daughter to be sure to be in the company of other employees when working late, and to make sure she's not alone when she walks to her car. Anstey said she is even more concerned about her son, whose responsibilities as assistant manager make him an even greater target.

"It worries me, but they want that independence and the extra spending money," said Anstey. "Kalise is more than aware of the weirdos and keeps an eye out for anyone who might be acting strange. The horror those little girls went through is something that will haunt many of us for the rest of our lives. Even though we didn't know them, our hearts go out to their families."

Sister Norma Gutierres, director of youth ministries for the Catholic Diocese of Austin, said she is hearing outrage and alarm from parents concerned about the murders. Some are questioning whether their children, or any teen-ager, should be responsible for locking up businesses late at night.

"I tell them that there are many 16-year-olds locking up these places all over the city," Gutierres said. "These kids need the money and are given the jobs with late hours that no one else wants. I'd hate to think we will take these jobs away from our kids because they are too young . . . because then there will be no hours for them, unfortunately."

Sister Gutierres said the murders have rekindled communication between parents and children. Parents are calling to check on their children who are on the late-night shifts and children are calling home when its time to lock up, saying they will be leaving soon, so their parents can keep closer tabs.

"It's been really hard because nobody understands, and there is no understanding to it," Sister Gutierres said. "The only thing I can tell parents is that our children are going to learn from this and be even more careful watching the people around them and when they are closing up.

"My concern is that we don't pull these jobs from our kids, because they need the jobs. I'd hate for them to get jobs even more dangerous, like pushing drugs."

Ben's Longbranch Barbecue at 900 E. 11th St. started closing at 6 p.m. a year ago. The restaurant used to serve until 8 p.m. during the week and 10 p.m. on weekends, owner Ben Walsh said. He said he closes earlier because his restaurant has been broken into about 10 times during the past 10 years.

Jorge D. Guerra said his restaurant, El Azteca, at 2600 E. Seventh St., has been broken into 12 times during the past 29 years. He said he has hired a security guard and installed an internal electronic security system.

"You have to be prepared yourself," he said.

Violence complicates secure lives of children

Continued from A1

bus shootings.

"They are dealing not only with death and grief, but with the fear of the unknown — what's going to happen next? They are real complicated feelings."

The perception that acts of violence are increasing is affecting not only children, but entire families. Andy Bearden, youth minister at Millwood Baptist Church, said, "I've dealt with a couple of parents who wouldn't let their kids go out Saturday night. The parents wouldn't allow it because they were afraid."

The perception is that acts of violence are now occurring in heretofore safe places — a cafeteria in Killeen, a yogurt shop in northwest Austin, even bright yellow school buses.

Four times since school began, buses in Austin and in Round Rock have been hit by gunfire. In one attack, a middle school girl suffered a serious eye injury.

"There is no question that the kids are being pretty profoundly affected by these acts of violence," said the Rev. William Denham, executive director of the Counseling and Pastoral Care Center of Austin.

"You can read of it in books, and you draw a picture of it in your mind. You see it in movies, and it becomes concrete, but there is still a bit of a distance. But when violence involves somebody you know, it becomes profoundly distressing," Denham said.

"It is affecting their behavior; it also means sleepless nights. Children are losing their sense of trust. They live in fear.

"It isn't just the boogeyman in the corner anymore," he said. "It's the real man in the corner."

Phillips said the violence that has occurred "is bad enough for us as adults, but it's worse for the children. Some of them are becoming traumatized."

Some are saying life is not worth living, said Phillips, and others are wondering why they should follow the rules of society and law when "somebody will just gun you down."

"One volunteer counselor came up to me (this week) and said she thought this girl was fantasizing. The girl had described how she knew people who had been attacked and then she talked about a girl she knows who was stabbed 97 times."

The girl's story was no fantasy. She was describing what happened two years ago, to Kelly Brumbelow, a 15-year-old Round Rock honor student and cheerleader. The girl was found under a woodpile in the back yard of her next-door neighbor and classmate, Terrence Sampson, who also was 13. Sampson was convicted of murder and sentenced to 30 years in the slaying.

"All of these tragedies have a cumulative effect on kids that we don't even think about," said Phillips. "Each tragedy creates a ripple effect, and a large group of kids remember."

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