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Local News



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Shoppers unafraid

Shooting at Nebraska department store that killed 8 doesn't keep Oakland residents away from local malls

By Karen Auchterlonie
Journal Register News Service

People were still turning out to shop at Oakland County malls Thursday after a 19-year-old gunman killed eight people and took his own life in a Nebraska shopping mall.

"You feel safe as much as you can. Bad things can happen anywhere, but you can't let that bother you," said Susan Boatman of Clarkston, as she finished holiday shopping at Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills.

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Kimberly Shadwick, the manager of Great Lakes Crossing, said the safety and security of stores, customers and employees is always the mall's first priority.

"We work very closely with local law enforcement to prepare for any kind of emergency situation that might arise, and certainly hope we never have to implement the procedures," Shadwick said.

In Novi, police and Twelve Oaks Mall security officials had a training exercise at the end of November, simulating a shooting incident similar to the one that happened at Omaha's Westroads Mall.

"I am certainly pleased we have been practicing these plans, because you never know when something like this is going to happen -- there's no way to explain the act of a madman, but we're very serious about preparedness efforts," said David Molloy, Novi's



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chief of police.

Novi's police department has been conducting disaster exercises with the Twelve Oaks Mall for more than 20 years, Molloy said. The police department even has an office inside the mall's security office, and officials from both the police and mall security can talk with one another on radio channels.

"We're very fortunate we have a great police department, and they've been super partners with us," said Dan Jones, mall manager at Twelve Oaks.

Vickie and Russell Wendland of Clarkston weren't afraid to go shopping at Great Lakes Crossing on Thursday.

"I'm a little worried if someone can get an assault rifle into a shopping mall," Russell Wendland said.

CBS News reported that police recovered an SKS assault rifle believed to have been used by the Nebraska shooter, Robert Hawkins.

Preventing weapons being brought into malls by restricting bags, backpacks or coats carried by shoppers isn't so easy, however.

"Our society loves and appreciates our freedom, and it's difficult to judge how people would react (to such a restriction). And in wintertime, everybody has coats, and this time of year, people are carrying multiple packages with them," Jones said.

Putting metal detectors in malls was an idea discussed industrywide after 9/11, Jones said.

"It goes back to the fact that these are very isolated incidences, and the industry as a whole hasn't found (metal detectors) to be a necessity," Jones said.

Wednesday's shooting was the second to occur this year. In February, 18-year-old Sulejmen Talovic shot and killed five people in Salt Lake City's Trolley Square shopping mall.

"Will it encourage people to shop elsewhere? I can't imagine it wouldn't," said Mike Bernacchi, professor of marketing at the University of Detroit Mercy.

While the shooting probably won't slow holiday spending, it may result in more money being spent at strip malls, single-standing stores and online retailers, Bernacchi said.

Mary Yang of Pontiac said news of the shooting wasn't really a concern that would keep her from shopping at Great Lakes Crossing.

"I shop here all the time. I'm pretty comfortable here," she said.

Troy officer Gerry Scherlinck said extra police patrols have been added to the areas surrounding the Somerset Collection and Oakland Mall as a precautionary measure.

"We have a retail liaison, where one of our officers works very closely with both malls. There are multiple levels of security at both our malls, and we consistently talk to and meet with both of them,"

Scherlinck said.

Troy was recently rated the safest city in Michigan for its population category of more than 75,000 residents.

"This is a safe community across the board. It's a good place to come, shop, do business and live," Scherlinck said.

Larry Riederich of Grand Blanc was entering Great Lakes Crossing on Thursday and said

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he still feels safe shopping at malls.

"You can't tell when or where something's going to happen. You just have to live your life," Riederich said.

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