



E-Briefs

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NEWS BRIEFS

Businesses Face Crime Wave

Atlanta-area businesses are witnessing a wave of property crimes. Burglaries rose in five of the half-dozen Atlanta Police Department zones in the initial four months of 2008 versus the same time in 2007, while larcenies were higher in every one of the six zones. Thieves are targeting businesses and vehicles, mainly seeking out purses and laptop computers. The poor economy is being blamed by authorities for the rise in property crimes, as is Atlanta's recent population growth, as larger density can result in additional crime. Although the city police force has expanded from 1,433 sworn positions to 1,833 over the past six years, companies have hired private security officers to monitor commercial areas. Atlanta's Downtown Improvement District put together its 65-person Ambassador Force in 1996 in preparation for the multitude of visitors who flocked to the city for the Summer Olympics. Meanwhile, the Midtown Alliance added its Midtown Blue security patrol teams in 2000. Central Atlanta Progress Inc. President A.J. Robinson credits the Ambassador Force with providing a formidable law-enforcement presence in Atlanta that also includes the city police, Georgia State officers, the Georgia World Congress Center Authority, and the Capitol Police. In addition, almost 3,000 private security officers have been hired by Atlanta businesses.

New Battles Erupt Over Gun Laws

The Supreme Court recently ruled that the Second Amendment protects an individual's right to own a firearm for self defense, overturning a Washington, D.C. gun ban. However, legal experts say that the Court's ruling did not specify how laws should be applied in particular venues, giving gun opponents a chance to lobby for expanded gun-free zones. It is expected that lower courts will hear several cases on varying local and state gun laws. Florida recently passed a law allowing workers to keep firearms in their vehicles in employee parking lots, but the Walt Disney World amusement park argues that the law should not apply to its parking lot. An employee who challenged the policy was fired and plans to sue. Atlanta officials have also declared the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to be a gun-free zone, even though state law allows people to carry licensed firearms into restaurants that sell alcohol, state parks, and public transportation systems. Gun rights advocates also want to challenge a federal regulation banning firearms in most national parks, and the National Rifle Association has filed lawsuits against cities that have handgun bans.

Printer Dots Concern Privacy Advocates

An increasing number of manufacturers are building color laser printers with technology that leaves microscopic yellow dots on each printed page to identify the printer's serial number as well as the date and time the page was printed, says the Electronic Frontier Foundation. The technology has existed for years, but the declining price of color laser printers is making the practice a greater consumer threat. The dots can be seen using a blue LED light to allow the Secret Service to investigate counterfeit bills made with laser printers. Privacy advocates say the technology could be abused and used to identify political dissidents, whistleblowers, or anyone else who prints materials that authorities want to track. Electronic Frontier Foundation computer programmer Seth Schoen says there is nothing about the technology that limits its application to counterfeit investigations, and warns that people who are not doing anything wrong could have their privacy threatened. Schoen's tests show that the dots are produced by 111 color laser printers made by 13 companies. Xerox's Bill McKee says the dots are often a requirement to do business internationally, while the Secret Service's Lorelei Pagano says the agency is the only U.S. body with the ability to decode the information printed in the dots.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Stopping Terror at the Coast

U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents at Miami's Air and Marine Branch employ airplanes, boats, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles to help them keep terrorists, weapons of mass destruction, and individuals smuggling people or drugs from entering the country. The agents monitor the eastern, southern, and Gulf Coast regions of Florida's approximate 1,200-mile coast, primarily keeping their eyes peeled for boats traveling from Cuba or the Bahamas to the United States. CBP's Air and Marine Division, which was established four years ago when U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement's air and marine operations were reassigned to CBP, oversees the biggest law enforcement air force on the globe. The division boasts more than 700 pilots; 270 aircraft, such as fixed wing, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles; and 130 mariners with 200 vessels, some of which are high-speed interdiction boats. In 2007, CBP air and marine agents confiscated more than 87,000 pounds of cocaine and 307,000 pounds of marijuana, and arrested 1,200 individuals. The biggest problem CBP interdiction agents are currently facing is the increased number of smugglers carrying illegal immigrants. To identify and trace possible smugglers, the division employs two additional aircraft: a Lockheed Orion P-3B Airborne Early Warning and a Lockheed Orion P-3 Long Range Tracker.

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