

Former robber now offers advice

Says there are ways to stop recent spate of bank heists

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The number of bank robberies in Lancaster city in the past month — which reached six when an East King Street bank was held up Friday — could rise unless bank employees become more savvy, a convicted serial bandit says.



Troy Evans

Friday, a man wielding a pistol robbed Waypoint Bank, 100 E. King St., at 10:39 a.m., police said. Police are struggling to catch the bandits and have few leads to pursue because of poor-quality surveillance video and vague descriptions of suspects.

The key to stopping the string of robberies goes beyond increased police patrols and beefed-up security at banks, said Troy Evans, who served time in federal prison for committing a string of armed bank robberies in the early 1990s.

"Many bank robberies could be foiled just by somebody looking you directly in the eye and inquiring what your business is that day," Evans said.

"A bank robber always takes the path of least resistance, and if there's any kind

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of male presence within an institution, anybody that looks like they could be a threat, who could play Joe Hero like an off-duty policeman standing in line or a teller, the guy's going on down the road to the next bank."

Witnesses described the suspect as 5 feet 5 to 5 feet 8 inches tall, with a medium complexion. He's believed to be in his late 20s to early 30s and has short black hair, police said.

He fled the bank with a small amount of money. He was wearing a yellow baseball-style cap, a dark football jersey with light-colored stripes and the No. 27 on it and dark-colored baggy pants, police said.

City police Detective George D. Bonilla said bank robberies are a challenge to solve.

"We are doing what we can to prevent as many robberies as possible," Bonilla said. "It's not easy because we can't be everywhere."

Evans, 41, was released from prison in 1999.

The Arizona resident published a book last year titled "From Desperation to Dedication: Lessons You Can Bank On."

He has interviewed more than 300 convicted bank robbers and makes a living as a motivational speaker.

"The common thread among bank robbers is they're strung out on drugs or have gambling addictions," Evans said. "Most live out of the gutter and are flat-out desperate after losing everything."

"It's not a glamorous business in the way Hollywood portrays it."

Friday's robbery was the only one of the six in which the suspect displayed a weapon. Demand notes were used in the others, police said.

Evans said bank tellers should be suspicious of unfamiliar customers.

He said he robbed banks to support a drug habit and typically wore a baseball cap and sunglasses.

The demand notes he slipped to the tellers were written on deposit slips and requested \$20 bills, \$50 bills and \$100 bills with instructions to leave out dye packs and bait money.

"It's pretty much common knowledge the people who work in the banks are instructed by policy to do exactly as you tell them to do," Evans said. "Why go into a liquor store where the owner might have a gun behind the counter? Why not go into a place where they're instructed to give you money?"

There were just two days between the bank robberies this week, and it's been 19 days since police made an arrest in one of the cases.

Detectives received tips from the public after descriptions and surveillance-video images were published by the media.

The majority of the suspect photographs, however, have been of poor quality. A picture wasn't available Friday because it was too blurry, Bonilla said.

Evans never advises banks to alter policies that could jeopardize employee safety, but he suggests simple methods to keep away bandits.

Because bank executives want to create a friendly atmosphere without guards or tellers behind bullet-proof glass, they should hire more men and use greeters, especially on Fridays, when most robberies happen, Evans said. "If I walked into a bank and saw a male teller who's bigger than me and might cause problems, then I'd turn around and leave," he said.

"Great customer service works, too. The legitimate customer loves to be greeted and made to feel important. The would-be bank robber hates it and doesn't want to be noticed."