

At courthouse, people try to bring in everything from razors to dead cats

SEIZED ITEM

Deputies guarding the doors of the county circuit courthouse in Annapolis confiscated the following items in April, May and June:

- 342 knives
- 35 scissors
- 2 box cutters
- 12 razor blades
- 13 pepper sprays
- 1 set of brass knuckle
- 1 loaded gun magazin
- 82 cameras
- 8 handcuff keys

By **SCOTT DAUGHERTY**
Staff Writer

Deputy Richard Palmisano is a superhero.

With X-ray vision — or rather his X-ray machine — he protects the people of Anne Arundel County from evildoers intent on smuggling razor blades, handcuff keys and knives into the county courthouse in Annapolis.

"We've only had six knives today. It's been slow," the sheriff's deputy

said at about 4 p.m. yesterday from his sentinel position at the front door.

From April to June, county deputies seized 342 knives, 35 scissors, 12 razor blades in wallets, eight handcuff keys, one loaded gun magazine and one set of brass knuckles.

"What people have on their person is unbelievable," said Deputy Harry Neisser, a sheriff's department spokesman. "Why do you need brass

knuckles?"

He said that by keeping those items out of the courthouse, they're keeping the judges, victims, deputies and other court employees safe.

Deputy Brian Schwaab, who also secures the circuit courthouse, said they get all types of excuses.

"Like 'I carry a razor blade to cut

(See COURT, Page A12)

A12 — THE CAPITAL, Wednesday, July 11, 2007

COURT

(Continued from Page A1)

coupons,' " he said, hypothesizing that the blades have more to do with illicit drug use than penny-saving. "Or 'Well, it's just a habit.' "

"Everybody carries handcuff keys, don't they?" Deputy Neisser joked.

Occasionally the deputies buy those stories.

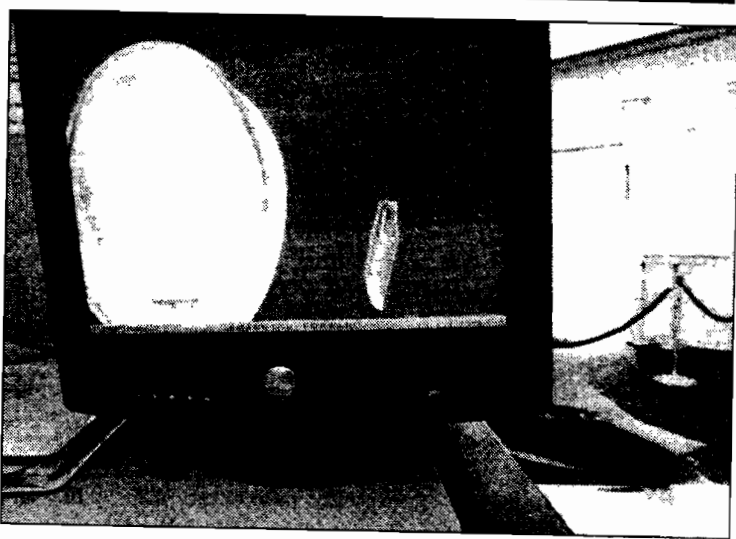
Some people, like bail bondsmen, do have legitimate reasons to carry handcuff keys. And a lot of people — Deputy Neisser included — habitually carry pocketknives.

Still, that doesn't explain the man deputies caught with a small pocketknife hidden in a pack of cigarettes. Deputies seized the knife at the time, but are quick to note that the man left it at the courthouse when he departed.

Deputy Schwaab said they've also found key ring trinkets turned into switchblades and belt buckles that hide knives.

"You have to know what to look for," he said.

Tragedies can happen. In 2005 in Atlanta, a man stole a deputy's gun, killed the judge and two other people and carjacked a reporter's vehicle to escape, according to the Associated Press. Brian Nichols, 33, who was charged with rape, was caught with two handmade knives earlier in the day.



By Joshua McKerrow — The Capital
A small folding knife appears on a computer monitor as it passes through the circuit court's X-ray machine yesterday. A man tried to smuggle the knife, which was used here to demonstrate the machine's ability, into the courthouse earlier this week inside a pack of cigarettes.

Most of the items deputies find are prohibited in the courthouse, but legal on the streets. That means the deputies keep them only while their owners are inside the courthouse.

Deputy Schwaab said that when deputies seize an item, they take the owner's name, address and phone number. Then, if the owner forgets a pocketknife or camera at the front door, a deputy will call and try to reunite them.

Sometimes the items are just too bizarre — like the time a man tried to carry his dead cat into court.

"He just laid it (in a bag)

on the machine like anything else," Deputy Schwaab said.

The deputy watching the machine quickly noticed something was wrong and asked what was in the bag.

"He just said his cat died and he didn't have time to take care of it," Deputy Schwaab said.

Not sure whether the man might have other purposes for the animal carcass — was he involved in a messy divorce or civil suit? — they didn't let him inside with it, he said.

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