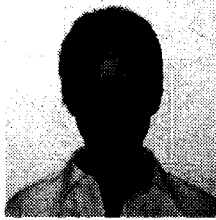


Students complain about theft in main parking lot

Police Chief says there have been none this semester



By **RACHEL SHEPHERD**
Capital Times Staff Reporter

Many students believe that they should not have to pay to park on campus for reasons ranging from tuition already being too high to the emptiness of the lots. However, the security of leaving the vehicle in the lot while students are in class tops of the list, especially with even more recent incidents of vandalism and break-ins.

"I feel that we, as the students, should not have to pay to park on campus," said Joe Ruggiero, MET student. "I do not consider the Olmsted parking lot, or the lot by the library, safe from possible theft. Numerous vehicles have been broken into this semester and last semester."

Police Chief Kevin Stoehr set the record straight. He said there have been no thefts this semester, but there were a few incidents. The most recent one occurred March 9th

when a driver's side window was smashed. It was considered a suspicious incident because no one witnessed it occurring. On February 14th, there were two instances of cars being egged in the parking lot. Stoehr said with a chuckle, "that was probably a personal matter due to the day it occurred."

"I feel that we, as the students, should not have to pay to park on campus," said Joe Ruggiero, MET student. "I do not consider the Olmsted parking lot, or the lot by the library, safe from possible theft."

And on February 18th, a lock on a car was damaged. Last semester, however, there were a few thefts. On September 4, 12, and 17, a CD player and stereo equipment were stolen from a car. Then on October 8th and 9th, a stereo and CDs were missing, as well as one license plate. Right before break on December 10th and 12th, a window was broken and CDs and a stereo were taken again. Finally, on December 15th, a car was vandalized.

Ruggiero noted, "it seems that all the thefts that occur in the parking lots have been taking place in the early- to -mid afternoon. It is also known that the Penn State Police circle and patrol the parking lots and the campus properties on a very predictable time schedule. It would be very easy for someone to note this and take advantage of a time when there will be no police presence in the parking lot."

Stoehr said, "typically, if we have one [incident] we usually get two or three [incidents] about the same time. Generally we also get break-ins throughout the local community...this is usually a regional type thing... they are not just picking on us." Stoehr mentioned that because break-ins occur relatively close together in timing, the police services try to have a high visibility. But usually the police find out after the fact. "The people that do this are very good and very quick about it," explained Stoehr. "We try to upgrade our patrol and surveillance on the area after an incident is reported and we encourage people to give us a call if they detect a suspicious incident."

Another concern to students is the fees to park on the campus. Ruggiero questioned, "does this make the school liable for any damages that are occurred while the vehicle is parked in one of the school's parking lots? I understand that everybody has to have personal auto insurance to cover their vehicle, but why should a student have their insurance rates raised for making a claim when they

Parking Lot Incidents Spring Semester 2003

- Driver's side window smashed on Mar. 9. Considered suspicious incident because no one witnessed the window being smashed.
- Lock on a car was damaged on Feb. 18.
- Two cars egged on Feb. 14

are paying to park on the school's property that is so-called 'patrolled'?"

Stoehr explained that the university has no liability. "We pay to register our vehicles," he said. "That money is used for the infrastructure of the lot for things such as upkeep and snow removal." He says auto insurance may cover damage with a police report, in which case the services will end up providing one.

But the fees are a big concern to students. "I feel that if we are paying to park, yes some of that money goes for up keep of the parking lot such as lighting, paving, snow removal etc. But we also pay tuition," explained Kristen Egresits, finance. "At a community college we didn't pay any additional money to park and we had security problems but that is expected, you can't complain. Yet if you are paying for a service you should get it. They are sure quick to look for tags and give out tickets, why aren't they as quick to pick up on vandalizing?"

Steve Mayer agreed with Egresits and said, "We paid a one-time five-dollar fee to park at HACC. I don't feel this parking lot is any more superior to HACC."

"There was never a parking fee and I cannot recall any vehicles being vandalized at Northampton Community College as they are here," said Ruggiero. "Many times I left my vehicle unlocked with the windows open while I was in class. Nothing was ever taken or disturbed. I don't think that there is a different class of people living in Northeastern Pennsylvania than the people living here."

But it seems community colleges weren't the only ones to lend students a break. Jason Hildreth, education, said, "I think the parking fee is just another way Penn State Harrisburg tries to squeeze as much money out of us as possible. At Penn State Berks we did not have to pay for parking, and there were no spaces available at the school because parking was a premium. Of course, you needed a pass to park at Penn State Berks, but there was also car theft there."

Hildreth commented, "I think that car theft is going to be a problem at any college campus because criminals are going to be attracted to a place where there is always going to be a nice stereo system in a parking lot full of twenty-something college students."

"We are safe," explained Stoehr. "Typically the problem we have more than anything is theft. We work with local police. We try to keep an eye on that. If the worst thing that happens here is a property crime, than that is better than a crime on a person. [The theft] is something we live with."



HELP WANTED

THE CAPITAL TIMES NEEDS YOU!
Positions open for the coming semester

- Assistant News Editor
- Assistant Layout Editor
- Copy Editor
- Departments and Features Editors
- Staff Writers
- Photographers