

Mebane City Beat: Tips for shopping safely

BY KELLY HUNTER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS OF ORANGE

The holiday season is upon us, and with that comes the hustle and bustle of shopping for great deals, attending holiday events, and more people out on the roads. The City of Mebane wants to ensure you can enjoy your time with family and loved ones and stress less this holiday season. Whether you are going on a trip, braving the outlets, or shopping online, the City has you covered on ways to protect yourself, your family, your home, and your belongings!

Did you know that there are more car crash fatalities during the holidays than non-holidays? According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, unsafe driving behaviors like speeding and harsh braking, or sudden hard braking, increase during the holidays from Thanksgiving to the middle of January due to busier roads and distracted drivers. One way to avoid becoming a part of these statistics is to leave early and allow extra time for delays due to higher traffic volumes or poor weather conditions. Aside from leaving early, the Mebane Police Department also recommends being mindful of distracted or impaired drivers and pre-planning your routes to avoid peak congestion times on Interstate 40 (I-40) and around the Tanger Outlets. Another way to protect yourself and your family is to ensure your vehicle is in good working condition. Good working conditions imply frequent oil and fluid checks, regularly checking your tires, and verifying your battery is charged before hitting the road. "Patience and preparation are your best companions during holiday travel. A little planning goes a long way to ensure you and your family arrive safely," said Chief McKinney.

In today's era of social media and posting everything online, it is important to be mindful not only when driving but also of what you share on your social networks. If you or your family will be traveling this holiday season, it is in your best interest to refrain from advertising your trip online. Posting about the upcoming trip or while you are gone can make your home a target for burglars. Before you leave to go out of town, share your travel plans with a trusted neighbor or family member so someone knows your itinerary and when you are due back home. Letting a trusted friend or family member know your plans ensures someone is aware of your whereabouts in case of an emergency. It will also alert them to suspicious activity occurring at your home on days when you are not supposed to be there. Citizens should also double-check that they have secured their homes by locking all the windows and doors before leaving. The Mebane Police Department recommends buying light timers to create the illusion of people being home to deter potential burglars or squatters.

Savvy shoppers know that when it comes to buying gifts, the safest way to do so is online and weeks in advance. However, for those who like to shop in person, the best way to do so is by shopping during off-peak hours to avoid large crowds. Popular shopping destinations like Tanger Outlets can become quite hectic, especially over the weekends, so the City recommends going at lunch during the weekdays if your schedule allows. No matter when you decide to head to the store, you should always keep your belongings close, be aware of your surroundings by keeping your head on a swivel, and avoid carrying large amounts of cash by using debit or credit cards instead. Never leave your valuables visible in your vehicle, whether parked at a shopping center or in your driveway. Valuables should never be left out in the open for others to see, as this significantly increases the chance of your car being broken into by thieves looking for easy targets. These tips might



sound obvious, but you would be surprised every year by how many people forget these simple steps and become victims during the holiday season.

Another way citizens can fall prey to becoming victims is through fraud or online scams. If you prefer to do your holiday shopping online, make sure when you are getting ready to check out that you verify the website uses a secure, encrypted connection by looking for "https" in the URL and a padlock icon in the browser. Only type in financial information if you confirm the business/retailer/website has security indicators in place to protect its customers. Always research the business you are about to buy from by reading reviews, checking for complaints on the Better Business Bureau (BBB) website, and verifying the contact information before making any purchases. Check that the online store has a physical address and customer service contact information. If the store does not, the odds are that the site is a scam, and you should not purchase anything from it. Remember that if a deal seems too good to be true or offers unrealistically low prices, it is most likely a scam.

Scam artists constantly work around the clock to invent new ways to deceive people and obtain their financial or personal information. Some common scam tactics to watch out for include phishing emails, which mimic legitimate retailers or shipping companies. If you receive an email you believe is of false origin, check the sender's email address carefully, as there is usually an extra letter or added number that differs from the legitimate company's email. Citizens should also be mindful of unsolicited phone calls/messages pressuring them to act quickly on deals or charity donations or asking for personal or financial information such as their social security number. "Scammers are getting more sophisticated, often using technology to make robocalls and cloned numbers that look local or familiar to gain your trust. Always be cautious—if something feels off, hang up and call the official number to verify," – Chief McKinney, Mebane Police Department.

Protect yourself and your banking information this holiday season by using strong, unique passwords for online accounts and enabling two-factor authentication.

If you plan to shop online, avoid public Wi-Fi locations such as coffee shops and use secure, private networks instead, especially when providing personal information or credit card details. Regularly update your antivirus and anti-malware software on your phone or computer. If your information does get stolen, immediately contact your financial institutions and report any unauthorized transactions or suspicious activity. Continue to monitor your credit reports and report the incident to law enforcement and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at IdentityTheft.gov. You should also change your passwords for all affected accounts. Another way to proactively protect yourself against identity theft is to enroll in a credit monitoring service that immediately alerts you whenever significant changes occur on your credit report, such as new accounts being opened, credit inquiries, or sudden drops in your credit score.

With all that shopping online or packages needing to be shipped to loved ones you may not be able to see this year, remember to always use a reputable shipping service with tracking capabilities. If possible, require a signature upon delivery to ensure the package reaches the intended recipient and avoid indicating the contents on the package's exterior to deter theft. If you are worried about a package getting stolen while at work or on vacation, utilize package lockers or select delivery hours if available. You can also have packages delivered to your workplace or a neighbor's house if you will not be home during regular delivery hours. Another security measure you can take is to install porch cameras such as Ring or Blink to deter theft and help track suspicious activity in your area.

While the holidays can be stressful, we hope this shopping and travel safety piece helps alleviate some of the stressors you may experience this holiday season. The City of Mebane wants to remind you that the holiday spirit thrives on kindness, and we should strive to be patient and kind to one another. "A small act of kindness is often the best gift we can give each other," Chief McKinney says. The City of Mebane hopes everyone has a safe and positively charming holiday season!

LANTERN WALK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We generally start talking about the Solstice Lantern Walk about midway through the year, but we start preparing lantern kits, and that's the first thing that we do leading up to the upcoming event, at around the end of September or early October," said Ivana Beveridge, programs and marketing director at the Hillsborough Arts Council. "In 2022, HAC did a kit collaboration with the North Carolina Museum of Art, from which we learned a better process for putting the kits together, which was, invaluable. Essentially, we order all of the supplies, get together a team of volunteers, and we have a kit-packing pizza party and do a sort of assembly line."

As Hillsborough's Solstice Lantern Walk has grown in popularity and participation, so, too, has the demand for lantern kits that are sold at the Art Council's gallery and shop on Churton Street. Just over the last few years, Beveridge said, the number of kits that are prepared for sales has grown from 300 to 500 for this year's event.

The updated and improved kit assembly process has allowed HAC to devote more time to ensuring the instructions for making the lanterns are clear. This year, the lantern kits will include instructions in Spanish and English, highlighting an effort to continue growing the lantern walk.

METAL DETECTORS

- WE INSTRUCT HOW TO USE
- WE STOCK VARIOUS GARRETT MODELS
- TREASURE HUNTING ACCESSORIES
- RENTALS AVAILABLE

BARBEE METAL DETECTORS

2008 S. Church St., Burlington

336-222-9232

www.barbeedetector.com

Since 1978



PHOTO BY IVANA BEVERIDGE

Thousands of people attended the 2023 Solstice Lantern Walk along the Riverwalk in downtown Hillsborough.

"It's another way we're trying to maximize accessibility for people and being able to engage with them to make a lantern to participate in the event," she said.

Hillsborough's Solstice Lantern Walk was the brainchild of Tinka Jordy, whose artistic and community influence has given rise to some of the town's most popular and cherished traditions, including the bi-annual Handmade Parade. It's a spirit that Beveridge believes is being upheld by the Arts Council in its efforts to improve and grow the lantern walk.

"It's really special that a person had some really cool ideas for the town and initiated them, and we're continuing to carry that torch forward," she said.

That has included stronger "way-finding" efforts and marketing of the walk, and adjusting the starting location further into the Riverwalk in hopes of alleviating bottlenecks along the path. This year's Solstice Lantern Walk will also include sounds that were carefully chosen to fit the organic and natural feel of the celebration of the solstice.

"We have collaborated with the Living Arts Collective to have meditative soundscape elements when you're on the walk itself," Beveridge said. "That's a little bit of surprise for folks this year. It's really important to me that it's not interruptive, it's not over-

whelming. But the benefit of it is that it helps to kind of naturally pace people. We're going to put drummers or wind instruments and musicians pocketed, kind of in the dark, on the route itself, to have some very tranquil, meditative sounds that you kind of wander in and out of as you're going along."

Beveridge also said the Arts Council is continuing to pursue ways to ensure the solstice walk event benefits downtown merchants. And plans for future growth of the Solstice Lantern Walk could involve shuttle service to parking outside the confines of downtown.

"I think the reason this event has become such a big draw for people is the meaning behind all of it," she continued. "This event is representative of human resilience — the idea that on the darkest night of the year, our entire community comes together. We make something, we show up and we like light up the night. We bring the stars to the ground. We sort of move mountains together. I think that it's so beautiful that we're able to do all of that. We can get through anything, really, as long as we have each other. That's always been a piece of being human."

For more information, and to register for the Solstice Lantern Walk, go to <https://www.hillsboroughartsandcouncil.org/solstice>.