

Robberies alarm store owners

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A recent robbery at a Riverdale Avenue restaurant has local proprietors once again fearing that a group of criminals are targeting neighborhood stores and wondering whether greater police presence would halt a recent rash of break-ins.

Sometime early last week, robbers bore a hole in the roof of the Ginger Grill, a new restaurant on the main commercial strip between 236th Street and 238th Street on Riverdale Avenue. The culprits then descended into the establishment, stole approximately \$100 from the cash register, and then exited through the back entrance.

According to owner Jeffrey Kabak, the break-in occurred sometime between 9:30 AM on Sunday night and 11 AM on Wednesday morning. The restaurant had been closed for those three days for the Jewish mourning period of Tisha B'Av, which includes a 24-hour interval in which adherents are forbidden from eating.

This episode is the latest in a string of similar robberies on that block. In February, intruders broke into Rumors Hair Salon, on the corner of 235th Street and Riverdale Avenue, making off with cash and \$800 worth of CDs and incurring much damage in the store's interior.

In March, Riverdale Graphics up the street was hit. In a maneuver similar to the modus operandus of the robbers of the Ginger Grill, individuals bore a hole through the roof and made off with phone cards, cigarettes, and cash.

And, soon after it opened, Salvatore's of Soho, an Italian restaurant on the corner of Riverdale Avenue and 238th Street, was also the target of the same kind of break-in. Uneasy and fearing that they will be the next to be hit, proprietors on the Riverdale Avenue strip are critical of the lack of police presence in the area late at night.

"If you have a patrol, and people see police officers, then there will likely be fewer robberies," said Jeffrey Kabak, owner of the Ginger Grill. "If they see a block with no police officers, they are less likely to be intimidated."

The manager of Riverdale Graphics agreed. "Police presence would make a difference," he said. "It's a whole gang of people doing this and not just one individual. They seem to be targeting the area because it is easy."

In April, Riverdale Avenue store-owners signed a petition calling for additional patrolling in the area and sent it to Detective Louis Rodriguez of the 50th precinct community affairs office.

"This letter is a sincere plea for help," the petition began. "These seem to be professional burglars who know what they are doing...it seems that nothing is stopping them! "We have repeatedly asked for additional patrolling in our area. Perhaps you can assign some officers to work on this situation or at the very least have a serious plan for patrolling.

"We fear for ourselves and our business. We would ask for additional patrols in the evening until early hours. What can we do? We need your help," the letter concluded. This week, however, Detective Rodriguez of the 50th Precinct refuted the idea that increased police presence would deter would-be robbers.

"If they are cutting through the roof, do you think that greater patrols will actually stop them? How do you patrol something like that, when they are on the roof?" he said.

Although Rodriguez said that the minimum number of police work the midnight shift, he challenged the idea that this stretch of Riverdale Avenue is in the midst of a crime wave.

"These robberies happen in spurts; two or three stores get hit. But nothing has happened in the past few months," he said.

Still, store-owners are now on edge once again after last week's robbery. One Riverdale proprietor, speaking on condition of anonymity out of concern that would-be robbers might take advantage of his fear and target his store, expressed desperation.

"It's like whoever is doing this is saying, 'We're gonna do this and nobody's gonna stop us.' Whoever is doing this is fearless and, they're right, no one is doing anything to stop them.

"You can't go to this many stores and have the police do nothing," he said.