

## Coastland »From 1A

Luis Loayza, the loss prevention manager for Sears, said Walden is constantly making mall staff aware of trends both within the mall and at malls around the state. It's a different dynamic from the mall Loayza worked at in Miami, where he said he felt more isolated from law enforcement and from loss prevention at other stores.

"I was a little surprised when I got over here," Loayza said. "It was almost like a complete 180 in terms of communication."

Sandwiched between Naples High School and Fleischmann Park, Coastland Center mall is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, gathering spots in all of Collier County.

Having come from road patrol, Walden had an idea what some of the issues were at the mall. But in community policing, his job was more than responding to crimes, it was to work proactively to prevent crime.

Walden took a couple of months to look for trends and understand patterns. He said retail theft, the predominant crime the mall faces, was never rampant.

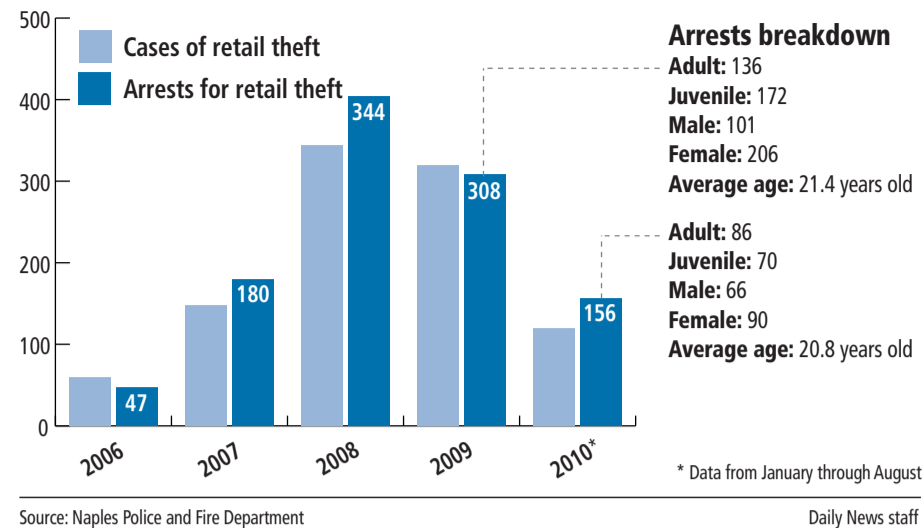
"But it was way more than I was comfortable with," Walden said, "and I got tired of egg on the face."

Statistics he's compiled on retail theft arrests at the mall show that thefts generally pick up from 2 to 6 p.m. Thieves tend to be busier on Fridays and Saturdays.

The average age of a person arrested for retail theft

## Retail crime statistics

A comparison of retail thefts at Coastland Center mall:



## Arrests breakdown

Adult: 136  
 Juvenile: 172  
 Male: 101  
 Female: 206  
 Average age: 21.4 years old

Adult: 86  
 Juvenile: 70  
 Male: 66  
 Female: 90  
 Average age: 20.8 years old

in 2009 and 2010 is about 21 years old, according to police statistics. Females are almost twice as likely as males to be caught shoplifting at the mall, although that gap has been closing recently.

Every month, Walden gathers new data, compiles it in a report and passes it on to mall security and store loss prevention staff. Much of his time is spent walking the mall, handing out fliers and business cards and getting to know store employees on a first-name basis.

"It's relationships," Walden said. "They'll go the extra mile for me, and they know I'm serious and I'll go the extra mile for them."

One of the best tools that Walden said police and mall security can use is the "trespass," which basically forbids someone accused of a crime from stepping onto mall property for up to five years. The threat of being "trespassed" from the mall is

a particularly effective deterrent for juveniles, he said.

"A lot of the times, the juveniles are more upset about the trespass than they are about the arrest," Walden said.

The relationship between the retail community and law enforcement hasn't fundamentally changed over the years, but it looks different, Glenn Harrell, the mall's senior general manager, said in an e-mail.

"The original idea of a 'beat cop' has just remorphed to the mall," Harrell said. "In a sense, Officer Walden fills much the same (role) as a classical old-style policeman."

Bras, panties, thongs — thousands of dollars worth — started disappearing from Victoria's Secret shelves in the Coastland Center mall in early 2008. For much of the next year, they contin-

ued vanishing, thousands of dollars at a time, every few weeks or months.

The culprit was deemed in the press as the "Bra Bandit," but the Victoria's Secret thefts were more likely committed by organized theft groups that roam the state and the country shoplifting, pickpocketing and scamming.

Walden had seen evidence of the professional hits since he started working at the mall, but didn't initially know much about who was committing them or how they operated.

"I was in the dark," Walden said. "I knew these were professionals. These weren't amateur hour."

So he learned. In early 2009, at the advice of the department's crime analyst, Marcy Boudle, Walden began attending training sessions put on by an East Coast non-profit known as the South

American Theft Group Intelligence Network — or SATGIN — which tracks the organized crime rings. He shared the knowledge he gained with other officers and detectives in his agency, as well as mall security and store loss prevention officers.

"This guy is a super hero in retail," SATGIN Director Robert Taylor said of Walden. "His work equates to savings to retailers of millions of dollars."

During the past two years, SATGIN has trained every Naples police officer and held training sessions for mall employees, for other local law enforcement agencies and for members of the State Attorney's Office. Walden said it is important that everyone throughout the process — from mall employees who first spot the thieves to the prosecutors whose job it is to send the thieves to jail — understand who they're dealing with.

While Walden estimates that 90 percent of the retail thefts at the mall are crimes of opportunity committed by amateurs, the professionals can take off with tens of thousands of dollars worth of items at a time.

In June 2009, Walden busted a theft group traveling in a minivan right after its members stole luggage from a car parked at the mall. Mall employees have tipped him off about several thieves using "booster bags" to defeat magnetic security devices.

In June, Naples police detective Joseph Craig arrested two women from Ecuador who authorities said had been shoplifting at the mall. In their rental car, Craig re-

ported finding about \$10,000 worth of stolen goods, airline ticket stubs showing they'd been traveling back and forth to Ecuador for months, and a log book of the size, shape and color of all the items they intended to steal.

"The Ecuadorian case, I've told him kudos," Walden said. "I mean, it was a fantastic case."

Walden concedes that some of the decrease in retail theft cases may be because of fewer people shopping at the mall during the economic downturn. In fact, there are several other variables that come into play, including the aggressiveness of security.

In 2006, the year Walden started working at the mall, there were far fewer retail theft cases — 60 — and retail theft arrests — 47 — than there are now. Part of the increase, Walden believes, has to do with more and better-trained loss prevention officers catching more thieves and reporting more thefts.

Since 2006, calls for service at the mall peaked at 3,976 in 2007, and dropped to 3,028 in 2009. There have been 1,671 calls for service through August this year.

Last November, Walden was the runner-up for the 2009 Florida Retail Federation Law Enforcement of the Year award. Although he's been a driving force at the mall, Walden said he's not a one-man show.

"The way I look at it, I can't change the world, but I can make a difference," Walden said. "I can't stomp out all theft. It's impossible. We're just trying to reduce it."

# SOUTHWEST FLORIDA RESTAURANTS GET A LITTLE A NIP AND TUCK TO STAY COMPETITIVE

## Restaurants »From 1A

emerged as M Waterfront Grille. Then a new company leased what had been Marie-Michelle and gutted it to create Miramare.

"And if something new comes to town, the other restaurants have to keep up," Dover said.

The something new in Naples is Mercato.

While Mercato isn't a direct competitor with restaurants in Venetian Village, it is on the minds of every restaurant owner in town. The development at U.S. 41 and Vanderbilt Beach Road has been seen by some as a direct assault on the traditional Naples nightlife on Fifth Avenue South and competition to all mid-to-upscale restaurants in the community.

But even without a new kid on the block, change is just part of the restaurant industry.

Skip Quillen, co-owner of the restaurant group Culinary Concepts, said the \$30,000 his company put into Yabba Island Grill this summer to update the flooring, change the uniforms and revamp the menu is part of a constant evaluation process he puts his restaurants through every few years.

"It's not about Mercato," he said. "You are forced to renovate (regardless of competition)."

"People like change. You see change and you think that's a restaurant that's going to be around for a while. People want to feel like they are supporting a business that's going to be around."

His argument is a compelling one for why Mercato is succeeding and also why a little bit of investment can make a restaurant with diminishing numbers suddenly viable again.

Honeycutt puts it a little more casually.

"People want to come in and then be able to say to their friends, 'Did you see what they did at Bayside?'" she said.

Bayside's renovation seems dramatic but is mostly cosmetic. While the interior has seen a major upgrade, the basic setup — an upstairs dining room and a downstairs bar and lounge with separate menus — stayed the same, as did the menus themselves.

"After people found out we were closing for renovation, I got literally hundreds of people asking me not to get rid of their favorite dish on the menu," Honeycutt said. "It ended up



Bayside Seafood Grill & Bar in Venetian Village recently renovated its interior, but the basic setup stayed the same, as did the menu.

being everything on the menu. So we just tweaked the little things."

That wasn't the case for M Waterfront Grill, co-owner Peter Sereno said. Two years ago, the restaurant's lease was up and Sereno, who owns the restaurant with his brother, Chris, was spurred to make changes by Venetian Village's

owner, the Lutgert Companies.

Sereno said conversations about a drastic overhaul had been going on for a few years when the Venetian Village management asked them to renovate.

"We definitely need a change," Sereno said.

But it wasn't easy. While re-creating



Bayside gutted and redesigned its dining room to give it a dramatic look.

the restaurant as a more modern dining experience brought in a lot of new customers, there were those who balked at the changes, especially when it came to the menu.

"We lost some customers," Sereno said. "But we brought in young people. Well, the new young people — 40- and 50-year-olds."

Dougal McCorkle, a senior vice president at Lutgert, said renovation is important not only for the restaurant's bottom line but for Venetian Village's overall business.

His company often asks businesses renewing leases to overhaul both the physical property and the merchandise or menu. The goal isn't necessarily to bring in younger customers, but to not lose longtime consumers to something perceived as more hip.

"As people get older, they want to feel younger," he said. "They want to be places that seem like they are younger."

Honeycutt isn't expecting a big drop in the age of her customers. The price point, with all entrees in the dining room starting at \$23, puts a meal there mostly outside the range of a younger demographic.

But the company is expecting a big jump in business thanks to the update.

"I think sales will be up 25 percent," Everding said.

Growth like that, even if the baseline is a pretty terrible 2009, is enough to make almost any business owner reach for the number of the nearest contractor. Still, people ask Honeycutt why they chose a recession to spend money on renovation.

"I think it's the perfect time to do it," she said. "People are starting to spend more, and updating now gives us an edge."