

Pokémon, security cameras and a foot chase: Milford shopkeepers catch alleged thief

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By Matt McDonald

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Red Bandana posted this photo on its social media pages after the items were returned.

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MILFORD — The toy shop's security footage from April 6 rolls.

A 1-foot-6-inch Pikachu figurine sits on a waist-high table. Then, a man in a bait-and-tackle shop T-shirt and baseball cap approaches. He glances twice toward the cashier, then picks up the Pokémon.

The man proceeded to walk out of the store without paying for the \$150 item, alleges Tiffany Kuykendall, one of the owners of Toy Krazy in Laurel.

The following week, the same person purloined vintage Pokémon cards, worth thousands, from the Milford collectibles store Red Bandana, claims its owners, Katie and Brandon Coenan.

Because they worried the cards would disappear if they did not act quickly, the Coenans decided to seize an opportunity to catch the alleged culprit themselves, with the help of a friend and the community. The story ended up involving loyal customers turned internet sleuths, as well as a flea market foot chase.

"It (was) a real roller coaster of a week," Ms. Coenan said.

From the beginning, Ms. Kuykendall was convinced she knew who was behind the theft at her store. Not only was the man's visage visible in footage from multiple cameras — videos and screenshots of which she subsequently posted on Facebook — but, after he left with the statuette, he returned and bought a few items with his credit card.

"So I had his name," she said, adding that she did contact police about the matter.

Fast-forward to April 12, when the binder of 510 Pokémon cards disappeared from Red Bandana. They were all from the very first sets released for the internationally popular trading card game when it launched 25 years ago. Ms. Coenan said the cards are "conservatively" worth more than \$2,000 — a testament to Pokémon's staying power.

"Pokémon is hugely popular across all demographics," she said. "That's part of why these cards sell so quickly."

And that's exactly why, if the couple wanted to see the cards again, they knew they had to act fast.

After Ms. Coenan posted about the alleged theft on social media, people were soon mentioning Toy Krazy and its incident. The two owners connected, and sure enough, security footage from Red Bandana showed a man who appeared to be the same one lifting the Pikachu.

Further, on social media, Red Bandana patrons sent in a flurry of tips. One commenter said the man frequented Spence's Bazaar, Auction and Flea Market in Dover on Fridays.

"Our community is just ferociously loyal," Ms. Coenan said, "and so they are so tenacious and resourceful." She added that she was careful with how she used the information online. "We would never want to unintentionally throw someone ... into a mess that they were no part of," she said.

Ms. Coenan said the incident was reported to the Milford Police Department, along with the name of the suspect, but she was concerned the items would be gone before he could be apprehended. So she and her husband decided to act on Spence's tip themselves. (Sgt. Robert Masten, a spokesman for the Milford police, said that the department "handle(d) a shoplifting" at the store but did not say whether anyone had been arrested in connection with the incident.)

That Friday, Mr. Coenan and a friend headed to the flea market. Ms. Coenan, six-and-a-half-months pregnant, was with them on speakerphone the whole time.

A half-hour went by at the market, when Mr. Coenan walked past someone who looks like the man they have been seeking, sans facial hair.

"At first, my husband was like, 'Is that him?'" Ms. Coenan said.

But, when Mr. Coenan and the man locked eyes, the latter took off into the market, she said, with her husband and his friend in pursuit. They caught up to the man right as he reached his car.

Meanwhile, Ms. Coenan was listening in and "losing my mind," she recalled.

Mr. Coenan told the man he could either return the goods or they would call the police. The man then escorted them to a house and retrieved the cards and figurine.

To share the news, a celebratory photo of the Pokémon items was shared by Red Bandana on social media, with the caption, "We caught 'em all!"

Ms. Coenan said she is grateful to everyone who helped them.

"This story has a happy ending," she said. "A lot of that is just thanks to our community. If they hadn't acted so quickly to get us that information, it might not have panned out."

She added, laughing: "I'm hoping we don't have any other story like this for a long time."

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