

It takes a thief to teach bankers

Albany Former bank robber outlines effective low-tech prevention tactics

JEREMY BOYER Business writer

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As a convicted bank robber who rebuilt his life through education, Troy Evans has established himself as a prolific motivational speaker, traveling the United States to share his story with audiences such as teachers, corporate executives and students.

But the group gathered Wednesday for an Evans speech in Albany gained special insight from his days as a thief. He was speaking at a conference of the New York Bankers Association.

"It is my hope to give you a look into the mind of the enemy," Evans, who lives in Phoenix, Ariz., told the roughly 160 bankers at the Crowne Plaza hotel in downtown Albany.

Because of the audience, Evans speech had two purposes -- one part related to overcoming personal adversity and the other dealt with practical tips for preventing robberies.

In 1992, Evans robbed five banks in three Midwest states over a six-month period. The then-28-year-old needed money to support a drug addiction and had decided he would either steal it from a bank or get killed by police trying it. Either scenario was acceptable to him at the time.

"Bank robbery is not as Hollywood portrays it," he said. "The people that are robbing these institutions are living in the gutter. It is very much an act of desperation."

Evans was caught later that year and sentenced to 13 years in federal prison in Colorado. It was there he decided to change his life by getting himself enrolled in college correspondence courses. He earned two degrees in prison, and was released 7 years early when his sentence was reviewed.

During his time in prison, Evans interviewed more than 300 convicted bank robbers. Based on those conver-

sations and his own experience, he has formulated tips to share with the banking industry.

Evans said high-tech surveillance and alarm equipment often overshadows the importance of training staff to be alert. Bank robbers will almost always visit the branch they are targeting before they commit their crime, so workers should be watchful for unfamiliar people who seem to be looking the place over.

"Every bank is cased to some extent," he said. "Your employees need to be looking for that."

Another deterrent is the presence of men within the branch, he said. Bank robbers believe branches staffed only with women are easier to rob, so they will look for such a place. He said this is especially true on Fridays, the day bank robberies most frequently occur.

"The would-be robbers have the mistaken belief that there's going to be more money in the branch on Fridays," he said.

When a robbery does occur, the staff should lock the doors as soon as the thief leaves the building. This act prevents the robber from coming back inside and creating a hostage situation if police are waiting outside.

Also, branch staff should immediately begin writing down their observations once the robber leaves. "It's amazing how much can be forgotten in 15 minutes or a half hour," he said.

Evans' tips were not necessarily eye-opening to Daniel J. Burke, president and chief executive officer of Glens Falls-based Evergreen Bank. But hearing them was still beneficial.

"Coming out of that source, it gives it a lot of credibility," Burke said after the program. "I'm probably going to sit down with our security manager and talk about some of these things tomorrow."

FACTS: PREVENTION

Troy Evans, a convicted bank robber turned motivational speaker, offered some theft-prevention tips to a gathering Wednesday of the New York Bankers Association:

- Watch for unfamiliar visitors to a branch who seem to be looking it over. Most bank robbers plan their crime in part by scouting the layout.
- Try to have at least one man in the office because robbers often seek branches staffed completely by women.
- Be especially careful on Fridays, the day most bank robberies occur.
- If a robbery occurs, look for any distinguishing characteristics on the thief, such as tattoos or scars.
- Once the robber leaves, lock the doors, contact police and immediately begin writing down details.