

Parrot Almost Stolen From Bird Store

Employees chase down thief who stole parrot

By Jessica Pineda

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Presley, a black-headed caique and resident of Omar's Exotic Birds in Lake Forest, California, is named after Elvis Presley. And he became famous when, on October 12, 2008, he was almost stolen from the store.

James Leland Loper, a 35-year-old man, scooped up Presley from his play area, placed him in his jacket and began to head for the store's exit. Video footage shows Presley popping out of the man's jacket, which caught the eye of Carina Pasulu, another employee, who shoved a visiting friend to chase after Loper. Danielle Skylar, assistant manager of Omar's Exotic Birds, joined the chase without second thought.

"No coherent thoughts were in our heads," said Skylar, "Except that one of our birds was being stolen."

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As Presley is worth \$1,300, Loper faces a felony charge. Loper's mother has personally apologized to the store, saying her son is schizophrenic and was off his medication the time of the bird theft. More family members have come forward, apologizing for Loper, to which the store is grateful. "I think if [Loper] did actually steal the bird," Skylar lamented, "the family would have brought it back." The close call has store employees praising their newly-installed surveillance system. Managing a bird store can be difficult, especially in a store like Omar's. All the birds are placed out on playstands, where they can interact with customers. It's a fun environment, but it can become very busy, especially on the weekends. Employees have to be on high alert for any suspicious activity, looking for certain clues in a person. "We have a lot of regulars," said Skylar, "And we also know customers who are coming in to just look at our birds but might not purchase anything." For suspicious-looking customers, she looks for tell-tale signs like large, baggy jackets, large purses or bags and backpacks. If the person is standoffish when approached, only gives one-word answers, has no eye-contact or covers their eyes, those signs alert the employees. "If you have a suspicious feeling, share it with your staff so you can all keep an eye on them," recommended Skylar, who noted that she neglected to do that herself the day of the theft. The store does have preventative measures to help ensure birds to do not get stolen. Skylar said all employees keep count of the birds and check on the numbers throughout the day. She also makes sure she has enough employees to cover the store: two to three people on the floor, one at the cash register and another handling grooming. She keeps in constant communication with her staff and tells them to talk to every customer at least once. It's something she recommends to all bird stores, and she also stresses having cameras. "Surveillance, surveillance, surveillance," Skylar said. "We just got our system and it's already paid for itself. Safe and sound, Presley is fine after the theft and he even has a new home. One of his rescuers, the friend who chased down Loper, bought Presley and is taking him home soon.