

# Reputation out of hock

**Pawnshops clean up their act. The guy behind the counter with the Iron Maiden T-shirt fades away**

**MIKE KING, The Gazette**

Published: Saturday, August 05, 2006

Montreal police spokesperson Melissa Carroll said the value of stolen goods recovered by pawn shops in the northern part of the city in the past year and returned to their owners was \$110,000.

Carroll also pointed out there are nearly 70 police officers assigned to cover pawn shops and second-hand stores in the city.

In her 2003 thesis, Universite de Montreal criminology student Veronique Linteau debunked the myth that pawn shops are geographically associated with residential burglaries and foster criminality in the neighbourhoods in which they are located.

Linteau said a police study on pawn shops in the 1990s suggested 70 per cent of the items sold in Montreal's pawn shops were stolen property.

As part of her thesis, she even interviewed burglars.

"They said they fenced through friends because they felt pawn shops were too dangerous," Linteau said.

Police based their assumptions on the fact that pawn shops usually set up in poorer sectors where criminal activity is usually higher, she said.

In the September 2004 edition of the university's Forum publication, Linteau's professor Pierre Tremblay wrote: "Why would a pawnbroker, who has a well-established registered business, put his enterprise in peril by banking on stolen property when thieves can get rid of stolen goods at a flea market without being accountable to anyone?"

Tremblay supported his student's conclusion that the police interpretation was unfounded.

The pawnbrokers association insists less than half of one per cent of all loans are identified as stolen goods.

[mking@thegazette.canwest.com](mailto:mking@thegazette.canwest.com)

## **Pawnbroking has been around for 3,000 years**

Pawnbroking might not be the oldest profession, but it must come close.

The practice dates back at least 3,000 years to China, originating in Buddhist monasteries where donated wealth was given to the monks to use for assets to lend money to the public.

There were more than 23,000 pawnshops in China by 1812 and the number was continuing to grow until Communism arrived in the

mid-1930s wiping out pawnshops along with other private enterprises.

Pawnbroking can also be traced to ancient Roman and Greek civilizations.

The word "pawn" originates from the Latin word "patinum," which means cloth or clothing - the principle assets of people in

Europe's early centuries, which were used as collateral to borrow money.

There are Biblical references to pawnbroking and operating a pawnshop became an accepted and honourable occupation during the Middle Ages after the Catholic Church relaxed laws against usury.

The Medici family, which established a trading and banking empire in Italy in the 15th century, is recognized as responsible for the universal symbol of pawnbroking - three hanging gold balls that were part of the family crest.

That symbol gained prominence when the Medicis began to open branches abroad.

Queen Isabella of Spain is reported to have pawned some of the crown jewels to finance Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World in 1492.