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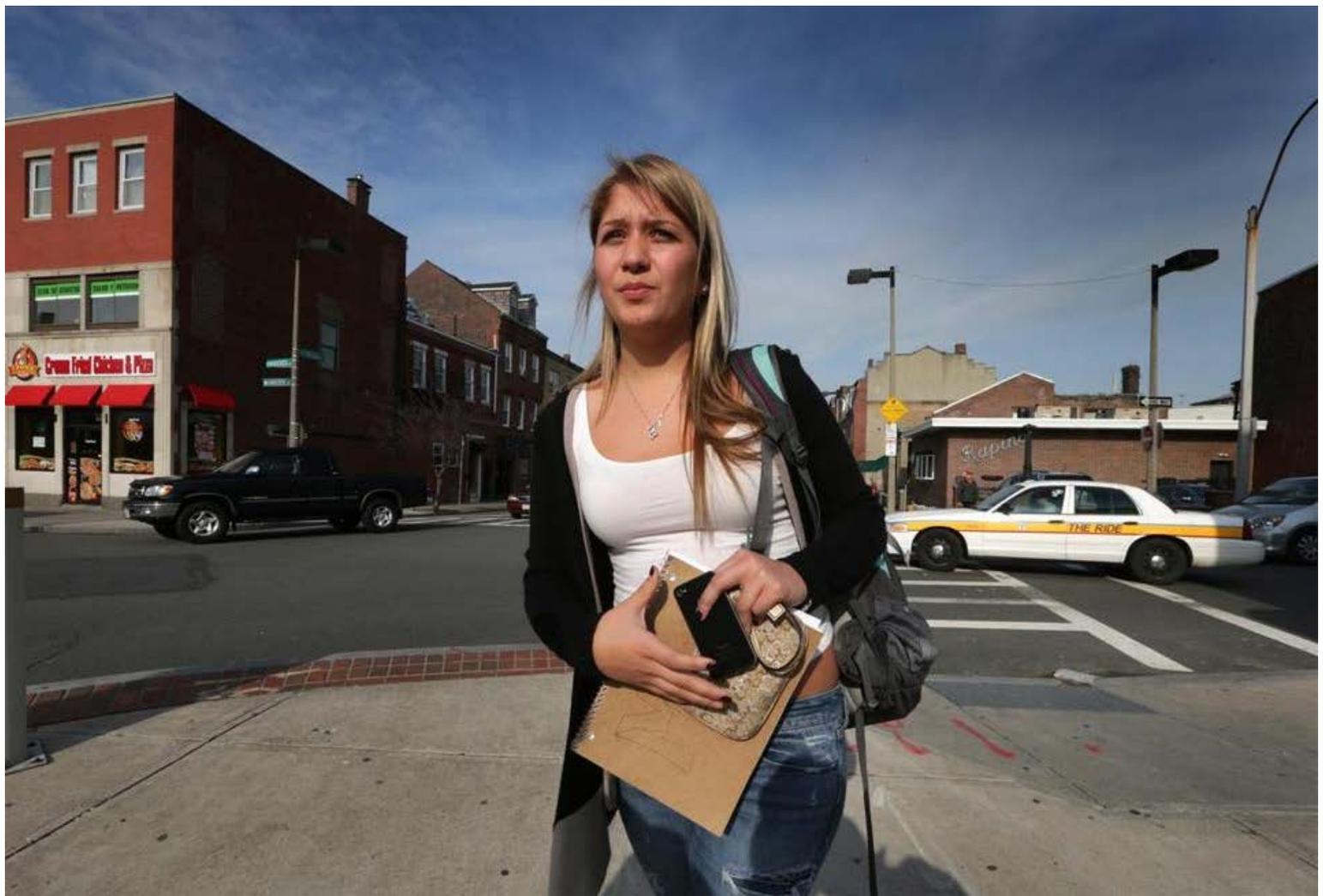
Metro

Pedestrians on edge after East Boston robberies

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 07, 2013

 ARTICLE

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BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF

Maria Vargas, a senior at East Boston High School, said she avoids walking around late at night. Vargas tries to use the public transportation system, get a ride from a friend, or hail a cab.

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Police have increased their presence and warned pedestrians to be vigilant after four robberies were reported over five days recently in the Maverick Square area of East Boston.

The crimes — two of which were carried out at gunpoint — have rattled the bustling neighborhood of taquerias, small merchants, and brick apartment buildings.

“It’s concerning because it’s not something that’s been happening for a while,” said Maria Vargas, 18, a senior at East Boston High School who grew up and lives in the area. “It just started happening all of a sudden. It’s scary.”

Vargas said she avoids walking around late at night. She will try to take public transportation, get a ride from a friend, or hail a cab if she can.

If she must walk, she tries to do so in a group and does not listen to music on headphones.

"It's very threatening because it can happen to anyone," she said. "It's mostly at night, but it can happen at anytime. Anybody can creep up on anybody."

No one has been charged in connection with the robberies. But authorities have found evidence that may link two men to two of the attacks and another man to a third robbery, Boston police spokeswoman Cheryl Fiandaca said.

Those three men were arrested in East Boston on gun and drug charges Feb. 27, two days after the most recent robbery, she said.

The first robbery, on Feb. 21, reportedly happened at 6 a.m., police said. The other three occurred between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m.

In all four instances, victims told authorities they were attacked by two or more suspects. In two of the cases, the robbers reportedly wore black and white bandanas.

Cash, wallets, cellphones, and a gym bag were stolen in the robberies, according to police.

The robberies were reported in the area of Bremen and Porter streets; Sumner and Bremen streets; Orleans and Haynes streets; and near 89 Orleans St.

At a meeting of the Eagle Hill Civic Association, Captain Kelley J. McCormick, District A-7 commander, told residents that while the robberies were clustered, police were not convinced they are connected.

"We don't think it's one group for all the robberies; we just think it happened around the same place, same time," McCormick said. Extra officers are patrolling in the area of the robberies, he said.

Paul Walsh, a 62-year-old retired court officer, has lived near Maverick Square for three decades. As he

RECENT ROBBERIES



SOURCE: Boston Police Department

PATRICK GARVIN/GLOBE STAFF

walked around last week, he said he welcomed a heavier police presence.

"You walk around here at night, it's a desolated area," he said. "I want to see more cops walking the beat.

"It doesn't bother me. I can take care of myself," he added. "But I'm concerned for the people who can't defend themselves."

As director of East Boston Main Streets, Max Gruner works closely with owners of small businesses. He said few merchants have expressed concern about the robberies. He said he believes East Boston is safe and commended police for their efforts to keep it that way.

"From what I gather, people are always surprised when there's a spree of something — two, three, four in a row," he said. "But overall, I believe people feel comfortable around here at night. I haven't heard anybody voicing overt concern."

Police reminded pedestrians to be aware of their surroundings, especially at night; to try to walk with someone else and in well-lit and populated areas; to make eye contact with passersby; to avoid talking on cellphones and wearing headphones; and to wear shoes that will not impair mobility.

"If you think that someone is following you, switch direction or cross the street," police advised. "Walk toward an open store, restaurant, or residence and call police."

Police ask anyone with information about the robberies to call 617-343-4234.

Globe correspondent Jeremy C. Fox contributed to this report. Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com.

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