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THIS STORY

What we lost this summer

Items range from keys to cameras, rings

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Christopher P. Stich, 2003 graduate of Germantown High School: Do you know where your class ring is?

Advertisement

There's more left behind at the end of August than a summer love and a broken heart. For starters, try dentures, the mouthpiece of a cordless phone, a TV tray stand minus the TV trays and a medic alert button. All were among the cache scored during the recent Wisconsin State Fair.

By the way, Christopher, that includes your ring.

When it's time to say goodbye to the summer, it might be wise to check your purse, your suitcase and your closets at home. Chances are you've inadvertently said "so long" to your cell phone or your car keys, too. And those pictures you took of vacation? Better check again that the camera is still around. The more we pack with us, even for carefree summer events, the likelier we are to leave one or two things behind.

At the Hilton City Center Milwaukee, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., employees have found golf clubs, coolers (sometimes full of beverages and beer), a \$5,000

bracelet and a few, ahem, bedtime-related gadgets too embarrassing for the staff to repeat.

With 730 guest rooms and an in-house water park, the Hilton is bound to have some misplaced items. Beyond the expected stockpile of flip-flops, the lost inventory has included two

Lost and Found



Photos/Rick Wood

A beauty pageant sash and crown, phones, glasses, jewelry and clothing were among the items unclaimed at the lost and found department at the State Fair. If you're still looking for something you lost at the fair, try the West Allis Police Department, where items without obvious owners were sent afterward. Or maybe you left that camera or cell phone at the ballpark, or the hotel, or the airport.



Lorin Christie, a State Fair safety officer, is framed by a TV tray stand that was found on the State Fair grounds. Fair employees figure they give back six of every 10 items found at the end of the day.



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bicycles - one found in a walkway and another left on a floor. One was claimed, said Sean Sherrodd, senior director of loss prevention.

There was the time someone left a desktop computer monitor. And for some reason Sherrodd cannot fathom, about once a month a guest will leave behind an empty suitcase.

Perhaps it's the heat of the moment or a flush of excitement that causes us to misplace things or forget entirely that we ever had them in hand.

Maybe we just have too much stuff.

Go figure why someone would leave a calculator at a Brewers game. Binoculars, yes. Caps and gloves, a given. But a calculator?

"Someone left \$25 cash in a cup holder," said Mike Serio, Brewers head of guest relations and lost and found. The money was turned over to Brewers' charities when it wasn't claimed.

Cell phones and sashes

Cameras, cell phones and keys lead the list of lost items, but baseball fans also have parted ways with eyeglasses, grills, sweaters and jackets, jewelry, credit cards and driver's licenses. They're not always in a hurry to claim them, either, Serio said. Calls for important items such as keys and cell phones have come in as much as three weeks later.

It makes you wonder.

Mrs. Wisconsin America, who left her sash neatly folded in a small plastic container, finally picked up her royal ribbon more than a week after leaving it behind at the State Fair.

Fair employees pride themselves on reconnecting most people with their lost goods, said Patty Kemmerling, who spent the run of the fair logging lost items in a trailer at the north end of the fairgrounds.

Staffers try all kinds of ways to find the owner of lost objects (note to the woman who left the purple backpack on the grounds: They found you through the prescription bottles inside). But no one knew exactly how to get in touch with the beauty queen identified only as Debra.

Kemmerling and others were a little creeped out by the dentures someone left behind, but it's all part of the job. During the run of the fair, employees tagged as lost a cane that could be used by only a very tall man; lunch boxes (Spider-Man among them), umbrellas, sippy cups, one small child's flip-flop, red hats (more than one) and purses, to name a few items.

The wheelchair left in the parking lot eventually was retrieved, but how do you forget something as cumbersome or necessary as that?

All that stuff

As a society, we seem to have a lot of stuff, and we hesitate to leave it all at home.

"Often we (and our kids) carry with us two things: entertainment to keep us occupied (iPods, CD players, hand-held electronic games, small DVD players) and technology to keep us connected (cell phone, Blackberry, laptop)," Stacy DeBroff, author of "The Mom Book: 4,278 Tips for Moms," offered in an e-mail.

"These get inadvertently left behind everywhere from hotel rooms to soccer fields to rental cars to school lockers. And because we and our kids have come to think of them as indispensable (perish the thought of being unplugged or unconnected), we are both addicted to them and will immediately replace them."

For instance, before the lost-and-found staff at State Fair could tell one man they found his cell phone, he'd already purchased a new one. He told the staff to donate his old one to charity.

"I feel like we have become a society much like the Snoopy character Pigpen who has the dust cloud following him at all times," DeBroff wrote. "Now we carry huge totes, bags, suitcases to take things with us wherever we go just in case we need them. Whether catching up on office work or running the team stats while watching the baseball game, we double-task everywhere we go."

Fair employees figure they give back six of every 10 items found at the end of the day. For credit cards, they call the issuing company, which calls the card owner.

However, the bowler's club card was a little more difficult. If you've lost it, check with the West Allis Police Department, where everything without an obvious owner was sent at the end of State Fair.

A couple decades ago, time management was all the rage. It's still an issue but it goes hand-in-hand with inventory management, said Kerul Kassel, who coaches people in how to manage their time and resources.

"We're clearly a material culture, and our worth is largely based on our possessions," she said in an e-mail. "We've now got so much more stuff to be responsible for, so many more places we go to, and so many things on our minds that it's very easy to lose things."

Fliers depart, belongings don't

At Mitchell International Airport, Travelers Aid handles items that were left at the airport (but not things taken from passengers for security reasons). Volunteer Rich Krawczyk said workers see a steady stream of wallets, credit cards, sweaters and wedding rings that have been taken off in the restroom and forgotten. Most are turned over to the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department.

Midwest Airlines also sees its fair share of forgotten cell phones and small electronics. But the oddest thing was the time the crew found an ancient artifact that was probably a couple thousand years old, said Carol Skornicka, senior vice president for the airline. By tracing the seat number, they were able to find the owner.

Check twice when leaving the Milwaukee Art Museum to be sure you have your cell phone, umbrella or camera. Those are among the most popular items lost there, said Barbara J. Payne, the museum's director of visitor operations.

But also double-check that you leave with your souvenirs.

"The only items that stand out as surprising are the number of recent purchases made in our museum store that get left behind," she said.

Lost-and-found workers are happy when people are reunited with their goods. But not everyone can be, and that's frustrating, Kassel said.

"There comes a point that we have to cut our losses, even though we feel ashamed as well as irritated and annoyed with ourselves," she said. "Of course, it's inconvenient and can be expensive, too, but it's also part of living in today's world."

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