



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Young U.S. Marine, Sterling grad foils purse snatch

By **ROBBIE MAGNESS**

A would-be thief ran into a problem – quite literally – after snatching a purse from an elderly woman Friday at the San Jacinto Mall.

The thief's getaway path ran him directly into Baytown's newest United States Marine, Private First Class John Timothy Magness, who tackled the assailant and was able to return the purse and all its contents to the shocked but grateful owner.

Magness, 19, a 2009 Ross S. Sterling High School graduate, completed Marine Corps boot camp in October and Marine Combat Training in December, both in San Diego. He has been stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, since New Year's Day, but his Military Occupational Specialty school does not begin until early February. So, he was sent home to Baytown for three weeks, assigned to assist local Marine recruiters during his stay.

His chosen specialty in the Corps, ironically, is that of military policeman, but he never thought his crime-fighting would begin so soon.

The incident happened around 3 p.m. Magness said that, as he was leaving through the Market entrance, "I saw an elderly woman walking toward the mall. We've talked in training about looking out for people who might need a hand, so I headed in her direction."

As he got closer to her, Magness said, "This guy just jumps out from between two cars, grabs her purse and takes off running – right at me."

He described the assailant as a white male, about 20 years old, almost 6 feet tall and lanky, with shaggy dark brown hair.

After a moment of disbelief at what he was seeing, Magness said he charged into the man, tackling him. As both men jumped back to their feet, the thief charged again.



**Private First Class
John Timothy Magness,
United States Marine**

"In hindsight, I think he may have been trying to run past me," Magness said, "but in that moment, when he extended his arm toward me, I thought he was attacking me, so I knocked him down again," this time with a punch to the jaw.

Magness trained in mixed martial arts for a couple of years before joining the Marines. He has continued his training with the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program, and he said his work in the gym served him well.

"All the time I spent sparring with Jorge (Rey) and others definitely made a difference," he said. "When he (the assailant) reached toward me, it was just instinctive to duck a little to the left and throw the right-hand punch. To tell the truth, as soon as it happened, I was a little surprised at how hard I hit him."

"When he got up that time, he ran off in a different direction."

Magness said he thought about pursuing the man but decided against it.

"I didn't know if he was carrying a weapon or not," Magness said, "and I didn't want to have to deal with that. Plus, he had already dropped the purse, which was lying right there, and that was the objective anyway."

After scooping some stray items back into the purse, Magness returned it to its owner. It all happened so quickly, he said, that he did not even think to ask her name.

"She thanked me several times and tried to offer me money," he said, "but I told her, 'No, that's OK. I just wanted to help out.'"

He added with a grin, "I told her, 'That's what Marines are good for.'"

Magness is the son of Goose Creek school district teachers Wendy and Robbie Magness.

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