



PHOTO BY SIMSON L. GARFINKEL

Sgt. Stephen Daley displays several items up for sale at the Campus Police auction, held Friday.

CP Auction Brings In Much Money, Humor

By Simson L. Garfinkel

Time for another Campus Police auction.

The second-ever Campus Police Auction had been advertised for weeks, mostly through posters and a notice or two in Tech Talk. Its purpose: to clean out four year's worth of property that had been steadily accumulating in the CP's lost-and-found pile since the last auction.

"It gives students and others a chance to get a hold of equipment and property at pretty low rates," explained Campus Police Chief Anne P. Glavin.

A small group of MIT students and staff gathered outside W31-255 last Friday just before noon, when the event was scheduled to begin. Although most didn't know what they were looking for, Noah Freedman, a staff member of the Free Software Foundation, knew exactly what he wanted. "I'm looking for a modem — 9600 baud — and possibly a Lisp Machine," Freedman said.

Auction, Page 9

CPs Auction Lost and Found Items

Auction, from Page 1

The doors opened five minutes late, revealing five tables of loot. Each piece was carefully described, numbered, and placed within a zip-lock bag.

Along one side of the room, in the sporting goods section, were two dozen bicycles. None were mountain bikes, and only two were in anything that could be described as serviceable condition. In the back of the room, three tennis rackets, two tennis balls, two bicycle seats, five bicycle helmets, and a broken roof-mounted ski carrier were on display.

There were gold rings, diamond rings, bracelets, some luggage, and digital watches. There was a slide rule, but, suspiciously, no pocket protectors. It seems few get turned in to the lost-and-found: the finders prefer to keep them for personal use.

Marie Stuppard, an office assistant in the Mechanical Engineering department, eyed the best bicycle of the lot: a small blue women's ten-speed.

"Medalist? Nobody has heard of this brand," she said with disgust. Still, any observer could tell that the property had piqued her interest. Together with her companion, she carefully examined the bicycle's brakes, gears, and tires.

"I want to buy [the bike] for my 11-year-old daughter," she explained. "It may cost \$25 to get it fixed, but my friend, who is a PhD student, says to leave it with him for a night and he will fix it for free."

Most of the junk connoisseurs in attendance were disappointed with the pickings. "I was hoping at least for a good bicycle," said Steven Wadlow, who administers computers for the brain and cognitive sciences. Wadlow shook his head, then walked to the back of the room. There he found two computers: a Macintosh Plus (1 megabyte RAM, no hard disk) and an old 8080 Cromemco with two floppy drives.

"I wouldn't pay more than \$20 for the Mac," said Phil Servita, a computer programmer from Medford who heard about the auction in an electronic mail message and had driven down to the Institute just for the occasion.

Servita had come to look at the Hewlett-Packard calculators. "I'm interested in one of the 15Cs," he said. "At a ham-fest, it would go for \$10 or \$15. Here, I expect it will go for a lot more. We're in a room full of nerds."

There were perhaps a hundred people in the room, equally split between men and women, with dozens of people pressing up against the tabletops, elbowing each

other to get a better look at the items.

Few prospective buyers seemed to know anything about the value of the jewels, but the techies knew their calculators. In addition to the HPs, there were calculators from Casio, Texas Instruments, and Sharp. After a while, Vossmer relented and let the would-be bidders remove the calculators from the bags and try them out.

"What if you found something that you lost?" asked a person eyeing what appeared to be a ruby ring. People laughed knowingly.

"If you filed a report, you can have it," said Sgt. Vossmer. "Otherwise, you'd have to buy it back."

The bidding started with the bicycles at 1 p.m. sharp. At that point, nearly 200 people filled the crowded room.

The first bicycle on the block was a real junker, a green Huffy which sold for 25 cents at the end of the day. The blue Medalist, on the other hand, went for \$50. Stuppard was out of the room and missed her chance to bid on the item.

The bicycles were all gone by 1:30, and the auction turned to the jewelry, with Vossmer again taking charge. The first item was a ring with a clear stone in it.

"Do I have 50 cents for a diamond ring?" Sgt. Vossmer asked.

"Is it real diamond? Will it scratch glass?" somebody shouted.

"I wouldn't play a record with it," Vossmer shouted back. But, humoring the heckler, she put the ring on her finger and put her hand out for everybody to see.

"Don't check out the fingernails, just check out the ring," she shouted.

The ring went for less than \$20. Baratta held up another. "This one appears to be real diamonds and sapphires," he said in an official voice. The setting was determined to be 18-carat white gold, and the ring went for \$85.

It took an hour to get through the jewelry, and most of the women left soon after. Now the only people left appeared to be male graduate students and the junk crowd.

The watches came next. Everybody, it seemed, wanted a new watch. Most were black digital watches, and sold for between \$10 and \$30. But the hour was getting late. Soon Baratta began combining lots, putting five watches up for auction at the same time. "Five watches. Give me five bucks—there's one good one in there."

A big cheer erupted among the spectators when it was finally time for the calculators. At first Baratta

wanted to combine the calculators into a few big lots, but the crowd wouldn't let him. "At a time!" they demanded.

The first calculator was a prized scientific model from Radio Shack. "Five dollars," said Baratta. Nobody said anything. "You wanted me to do them separately!" exclaimed the officer-turned-auctioneer.

"Group them all except for the HPs," somebody shouted back.

The Radio Shack calculators went for a dollar each. Three Casio calculators sold as a group for five. Soon people started noticing that one person was buying all of the calculators. "I'm going to give one to my professor, put some of them in the lab, and hand out others at exams," said Kenneth Zemach, a graduate student in mechanical engineering. Before long, Zemach had bought 8 calculators for \$30.

Perhaps mistakenly, the CPs held the HP calculators until all of the others were gone. Most of the HPs went for between \$20 and \$50. The students who were still without a new calculator then went to Zemach, who resold them for \$5 to \$10 apiece.

Another big surprise was a Mont Blanc fountain pen, still in its original case. Baratta started things at a dollar, but a bidding war ensued between two fountain pen aficionados in the crowd, and the pen went for \$92.

When the Macintosh came on the block, most of the spectators simply groaned. Who would possibly want a six-year-old Macintosh Plus? Two people did, it turned out, and the unit sold for \$125. The Cromemco went off to the dumpster.

In total, the auction brought in \$2864, which will go to crime prevention and charity, said Glavin. Freedman didn't find a Lisp Machine, but he did walk away with an HP 22S — for \$41.

