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Be On Lookout For Downtown's Snatched Bear

The Capital Times :: METRO :: B1

Monday, March 19, 2007
By Lynn Welch The Capital Times

Downtown Madison's ambassador bear has been snatched.

Webster, the larger-than-life-sized stuffed brown bear and mascot of Capitol Kids, 8 S. Carroll St., disappeared Saturday, shortly after Madison's St. Patrick's Day parade.

"We're hoping it's an early April Fool's Day prank," said Jenna Hansen, co-owner of the children's clothing and toy boutique on the Capitol Square. "Maybe someone took him to a spa and is giving him the bath he needs."

Neither Madison Police nor Capitol Police have received a police report about the incident.

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Webster has been a familiar sight on the Square for almost seven years. The bear greets store customers as well as downtown visitors and regulars. It has had its picture taken countless times with tourists and politicians, including Mayor Dave Cieslewicz.

Webster's name reflects the original address of the shop, which opened in 1998 on Webster Street. Capitol Kids moved to its current location in 2002. Since Hansen and her mother, Peg Scholtes, took over the business in 2000, the bear has served as its open for business sign.

"I was always pleasantly surprised that he didn't go missing," Hansen said.

In addition to being an asset to the store, Scholtes said Webster was a valued member of the downtown community, passing out maps and reminding people to vote.

The mascot often dresses the part of downtown ambassador, donning eye-catching costumes for occasions and events. Webster wore a cow

outfit for last year's Cow Parade and sported athletic gear for the Ironman triathlon.

One couple dressed him for their wedding, Hansen said. And he's often found wearing political buttons.

On Saturday, Webster wore appropriate St. Patty's Day attire: a top hat with shamrocks around his neck.

Hansen and Scholtes think the disappearance is tied to crowds attending St. Patrick's Day festivities or the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association boys basketball tournament.

The store has a backup bear. But owners hope for the safe return of their somewhat shabby, but beloved, original mascot.

Webster's chair outside the shop now contains a missing sign. If you have information about Webster, Scholtes and Hansen ask that you call the shop at 280-0744.

\ E-mail: lwelch@madison.com



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