

Elderly storekeeper foils robber

By Marilyn Miller

John Jason, 70, the owner of Tillie's market at 506 Commercial St., Provincetown, was alone at 4 p.m. Monday when a young man came into the store and paid \$1 for a pack of Marlboro cigarettes.

The customer was wearing a hooded light-blue short raincoat with the hood obscuring his face, but Jason didn't pay much attention to that.

"The hood was over his head, with just a little crack showing and I couldn't see his face, but I thought he was wearing it because of the weather," Jason said.

But after taking the pack of cigarettes, the young man told Jason to reopen the cash drawer.

"I thought he was going to say he gave me a \$5 or \$10 bill, but then I saw the knife," Jason said.

The young man held a fisherman's knife in his hand and Jason realized he was being held up.

Despite his age—Jason will turn 71 in February—he wasn't afraid to do battle with the younger man and picked up a knife near the register which he uses to open cartons.

"When he saw that I had a knife, he took off," Jason said.

With knife in hand, he followed the man as he fled the store, saw him take off west on Commercial on a bicycle, and immediately called the police.

Jason provided a detailed description of the would-be armed robber, which was broadcast over the police scanner.

Aside from describing the light-blue raincoat, he told police there was a patch on the right shoulder of the raincoat and that the man was wearing brown pants.

A downtown shopkeeper, with his police scanner turned on, heard the report just as he noticed a man fitting the description driving past on a bike.

He called police to report the man's location and that he was still headed west on Commercial.

Seashore Ranger Jim Ebert was driving along Commercial with his scanner on when he heard the news, too, and noticed he was driving right behind a man on a bike fitting the suspect's description.

Ebert used his CB radio to notify police that he was following the suspect, who had just passed the Shawmut Bank and was still headed west.

Police arrived moments later and arrested the suspect near the Coast Guard Station.

Brian Leary, 18, of 11 Commercial St., Provincetown was arrested within seven minutes of the thwarted robbery attempt with a fisherman's ripper knife in his possession.

He was charged with attempted armed robbery of a senior citizen, assault on a senior citizen with a deadly weapon and possession of a deadly weapon. He pleaded innocent to the charges at his arraignment Tuesday in the First District Court in Barnstable. He is being held in lieu of bail.

Leary is the son of Janice Leary, who was murdered in 1981 at the Sandcastle Condominiums. Ronald Coleman was convicted of the murder a year ago and is serving a life sentence without chance of parole.

While being held in the Provincetown lockup after his arrest, Leary pounded his fist five times into the concrete wall and asked for medical attention at 6:30 p.m.

He was transported by rescue squad workers to Cape Cod Hospital for treatment at 7 p.m., and returned to the lockup

at 9 p.m.

"I don't know what happened to his hand, but we did take him to the hospital," Provincetown Police Chief James Meads said, noting he did not think Leary badly injured his hand.

Meads said he was impressed not only with Jason's handling of the attempted robbery and his ability to provide a detailed description, but with the efforts of citizens to help police catch the suspect as he fled across town.

"This is what's good, when we have citizens participating to assist the police," he said.

Leary faces a stiffer penalty than usual if convicted on the charges because of Jason's age.

The law is harsher on individuals who commit crimes against senior citizens, Meads said.