

Mugging victim's temper flares when city bills her for antiseptic

By Geri Throne

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — It was bad enough when a mugger at Winter Park Mall punched her, dragged her six feet and took her purse and \$500, said Linda Pearson.

But when the city billed her \$20 for "basic life support and first aid" for two packets of antiseptic a fire department paramedic gave her at the police station, Pearson said she had had enough.

"It'll be a cold day in hell before they ever get \$20 out of me for that," said Pearson, 39, who lives just outside city limits in Georgetown Estates.

Pearson's troubles began about 7:30 p.m. Oct. 21 in the east side parking lot of Winter Park Mall.

She rarely parks behind the mall — an area of frequent purse snatchings — but this time she found a parking space just outside a door to Penney's department store, she said. After making a purchase, she waited until she saw several people in the parking lot before leaving the store, she said.

"I heard this breathing five feet from the car. He was running at me like a bulldozer," she says of her attacker, whom she describes as tall and muscular.

When Pearson held on to her purse, the mugger punched her, knocked her

to the ground, then dragged her about six feet until her grip loosened.

Pearson, who suffered a swollen lip and scraped forearm, ran after her assailant but lost sight of him at English Court.

She got ice for her lip and medicine for her arm at Penney's, then went to the police station to finish a report and look through mug books, she said.

"My arm was burning," said Pearson, who asked a detective at the station for medicine to soothe it. Telling her the station had no first aid kit, the detective made a phone call. A few minutes later a fire department paramedic arrived.

The paramedic gave her a single-dose packet of medicine, which she applied to her arm, and gave her another packet in case the wound started burning again, she said.

Wednesday, she received a statement for \$20 from the city.

"We have a policy that we charge everyone. If we became selective on who we charged, it would become a nightmare," said Fire Chief Sid Ballou, adding the user-fee policy begun last year for rescue calls has been a "difficult" one.

The city charges \$20 for basic life support, \$35 for advanced life support, \$20 for the use of special equipment, and \$35 to transport victims to the hospital. He said the payment record is poor but the city does not hire a collection agency to pursue unpaid bills.