Making Money

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing may not sound like a very interesting place, but some pretty fascinating things go on there. It is the source of all the paper money in the United States. The agency prints billions of dollars each year, and the total number of bills in circulation defies comprehension.

Our bills actually are called Federal Reserve Notes. They are just one of the many products from the bureau, which prints all important government documents. It also advises other agencies on document security.

One of the most important tasks of the Bureau is to make our currency difficult to copy, or “counterfeit.” The staff works hard on the creation of new features each time a denomination is redesigned. Since 2003, the $5, $10, $20, $50, and $100 bills have been redesigned with new features that make duplication more difficult.

The Bureau also is involved in the education of people who handle currency daily. As forgers, or “those who attempt to copy money,” have become more competent, there has been an explosion in the technology used to make counterfeit bills. The decoration and illustration on a bill, as well as the type of paper on which it is printed, is used to determine whether it is fake or not. It is important that there are relatively simple means that ordinary people can use to detect the substitution of fake bills for real ones. The trust that people have in our currency is important, and counterfeit money in circulation can lead to an erosion, or “wearing away,” of that trust.