

## **KILLINGS PROBE STRETCHES COPS THIN HIGHLAND PARK TRIES TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES**

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The secretary for the Highland Park detective bureau was laid off July 1, so now two young cadets answer the telephones and take some of the tips that might lead police to a suspected serial killer.

The detective in charge of the case recently had to set it aside while he investigated a former city official accused of assault.

Citizens with tips, including a prostitute who wanted to report an attempted abduction, are sometimes turned away because investigators are overwhelmed with information.

Such is the status of the Highland Park police investigation into the slayings of several women who detectives believe may be the victims of a fast-working serial killer.

"I just can't believe we've had nine to 12 murders and don't nobody know about it," said the Rev. Julius Hope, pastor of Highland Park New Grace Missionary Baptist Church.

Since December, the bodies of nine women have been found in or near abandoned buildings within several blocks of a 1.4-mile **stretch** of Woodward Avenue in Highland Park and Detroit. Two other women have been found dead in the city, but police do not believe they are linked to the nine others.

A body found Wednesday in an abandoned apartment building turned out to be a man. Police initially said the body was female. Detectives are awaiting toxicology test results to determine the cause of death, but do not believe his death is linked to the others. He had no obvious physical injuries and was wearing shorts and two shirts.

Meanwhile, the trail to the suspected serial killer remains cold, police said, and residents are exasperated over the lack of progress in the investigation.

Some officers, experts and citizens questioned how productive the investigation can be given the obstacles:

\* The Highland Park detective division, with nine investigators and one juvenile officer, may not have enough people to catch a serial killer. Detectives have not been able to check some of the hundreds of leads in the case.\* None of the primary detectives on the case is black. Some say Highland Park residents, most of whom are black, are hesitant to talk with white officers. Public Safety Director John Mattox disagreed. "I think the most important thing is . . . not what race, it's that that this case gets solved," he said.

\* The 300 abandoned buildings in Highland Park make good hiding places for bodies. By the time police found the recent slaying victims, the bodies had decomposed and the killer was long gone. Mayor Linsey Porter is pleading with federal, state and private entities for help in tearing down the buildings, which the destitute city cannot afford to do.

"How many bodies have to be found before somebody realizes we need a million dollars to get rid of these buildings?" Porter said Thursday.

\* Four other police agencies are giving mostly superficial help -- beefing up street patrols and processing evidence -- but Highland Park's overwhelmed investigators are doing the brunt of the detective work.

\* The victims, most of whom have been crack-addicted prostitutes, lived and worked in a cloaked society where information typically is kept quiet.

"A lot of police agencies are not equipped to handle a massive investigation like that," said King County Detective Tom Jensen, who has worked for eight years on a task force pursuing the Green River killer in the state of Washington.

Jensen is one of two remaining members of the task force, formed in 1984 to catch a man believed responsible for **killing** up to 49 women.

Although that task force once boasted 40 detectives, the killer has never been caught.

Other cities have mounted massive efforts to catch serial killers, but arrests usually come with a little luck.

In 1977, New York City police assigned 300 officers to catch the Son of Sam, who shot six people to death and wounded seven others. Police were led to the suspect, David Berkowitz, after he was ticketed for parking next to a fire hydrant.

In 1981, Wayne Williams, blamed for **killing** 28 children and young men in Atlanta, was arrested after someone reported hearing a loud splash in the Chattahoochee River.

President Ronald Reagan sent \$1.5 million in emergency aid to Atlanta during the investigation. Highland Park's mayor said he doesn't expect similar help.

"I'm not Coleman Young . . . I'm a small-time city mayor," Porter said. He won't write directly to President George Bush because "basically I got a city with 23,000 people. He'll just say 'Who the hell is Highland Park?'"

Highland Park cut \$3.5 million from its \$16 million budget July 1, including funds for the secretary who used to answer the phone in the detective bureau.

But Porter said the city spent \$80,000 on police overtime between Feb. 17, when three women's bodies were found in the Monterey Motel, and July 1. More overtime was logged on Wednesday's grisly discovery.

Two FBI agents and the two serial **killing** experts from the State Police have helped sporadically in the last six months. Highland Park detectives have met periodically with Detroit police to share some information.

State Police said they would offer more help if asked.

"I'm sure they could use more manpower. You get tips, you've got to go track them down," said Detective Sgt. Paul Kinville.

"Highland Park is doing a superb job for the resources and the manpower they have . . . all the computers and fancy equipment in the world don't make up for old-fashioned sidewalk pounding, and that's what they're doing."

One Highland Park officer said Thursday they're doing all they can the best way they can.

"At this point here, we don't need any more help," said the officer, who asked not to be named. "Just give us time."

Public Safety Director Mattox asked that residents be patient.

"They don't want to see any more results than I, because this is our livelihood," Mattox said. "We feel just as strongly about this . . . as you feel on apprehending this subject."

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