

## THE HUNT FOR MAN CALLED 'E' - HOW DETROIT POLICE ID'D, CAUGHT SUSPECT IN SERIAL PROSTITUTE DEATHS

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Author: JIM SCHAEFER and AMBER HUNT, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

The Detroit cops spread the word on the streets. They told prostitutes, drug dealers and neighborhood store owners: We're looking for a guy named "E."

"E" was out there somewhere, stalking the east side, luring hookers into abandoned buildings by offering to pay for sex or to share drugs. Once inside, he bludgeoned them, raped them and left them for dead.

Since 1999, police said, he may have killed about a dozen women. At roll call before patrol shifts began, supervisors reminded street officers about "E." "Keep your eyes open, they were told. Talk to the hookers. Lean on the dope men. Gather some information.

Police said the attention paid off this week, thanks to a tipster on the street with a cell phone.

DNA test results received Tuesday link a 37-year-old Detroit man to some of the unsolved killings, Detroit police officials said. Police said they hope to link him to more.

Department spokesman James Tate said Wednesday that the man, **Shelly Brooks** of Detroit, was "a person of interest" in the prostitute killings, saying more investigative work needs to be done.

**Brooks** has not been charged in any deaths, but has been in jail since July 30 in connection with a similar attack in which the victim survived.

**Brooks** is being held in that case on a \$75,000 cash bond at the Wayne County Jail and is charged with assault with intent to commit murder and first-degree criminal sexual assault. If convicted, he could face up to life in prison.

Police said they noticed similarities between that attack and the string of fatal attacks and homed in on the woman's case, a brutal rape that she barely survived. After she regained consciousness in a hospital, the woman gave police a name: "E," she said. She knew him from the streets.

The woman testified in an Aug. 10 preliminary exam that she had known "E" for a month and a half. She told the court that the two had smoked crack together and had sex on several occasions before **Brooks** allegedly assaulted and bludgeoned her June 26, said Salle Erwin, **Brooks** ' lawyer.

Erwin said Wednesday that she hadn't heard from police about DNA links to her client or any of the slain prostitutes. "That's totally news to me."

But she said she knew **Brooks** was under investigation in the serial killings.

Other law enforcement officials, who did not want to be identified because of the ongoing investigation, said scientific testing found **Brooks** ' DNA on some of the slain women. DNA evidence wasn't recovered on all of the victims.

Everyone questioned for clues

Interviews and reviews of court documents and police records reveal a years-long team effort that led to **Brooks** ' arrest, a feat that featured several milestones before the man with the cell phone.

The victims were found dead between 1999 and 2005, but investigators began to see a pattern linking the killings in 2002.

The victims were found in the area of Detroit bordered by Van Dyke and Alter, and Jefferson and East McNichols. They all were killed by blunt-force trauma.

About two years ago, a Detroit sergeant put together a dossier on the unknown suspect. The Michigan State Police helped develop psychological profiles.

Police say they believed the suspect was a man, probably on foot, who used weapons like rocks and pipes from the immediate area to kill his victims, who were typically drug-addicted prostitutes. He chose the cover of abandoned homes and garages to commit his crimes.

Street officers from the Eastern District Task Force, homicide investigators and members of the violent-crimes task force began questioning people on the streets, neighborhood store owners and anyone out and about for clues.

In the June 26 case, inside an abandoned home with broken windows near Hickory and Linnhurst, an attacker savagely beat the woman in her mid-40s, raped her and left. Despite losing lots of blood, she survived and crawled outside to a sidewalk. Neighbors called police.

The woman's mother said Wednesday that her daughter still is recovering from her wounds and has been staying with friends.

The Free Press generally does not identify victims of sex crimes.

Police focused their attention on that neighborhood, combing it for anyone who matched the survivor's description of her attacker. Even the drug dealers were receptive, one officer said.

"Nobody likes a rapist. Nobody likes a killer, either ... so the drug dealers agreed to cooperate," the officer said. "They began their search because they knew him, with a street name of 'E' as well."

Team effort pays off

BeKira Rollins of Detroit, a former prostitute who has been off drugs for 18 months and now holds a full-time job at a department store, said street prostitutes knew of the east-side killings and were concerned.

But many didn't quit because they were addicted to drugs, usually crack, and hooking paid for their addiction.

"It's real dangerous out there," Rollins, 37, said Wednesday. "I was attacked in a guy's car. I didn't know if he'd stab me or shoot me."

When Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings announced last month that a serial killer was targeting prostitutes and she asked for the public's assistance, Rollins said her first reaction was relief that she had chosen to beat her addiction and get off the streets.

"That could have been me," she said.

Bully-Cummings was unavailable Wednesday for comment, but on the evening of July 30, the attention she requested - along with the officers working the streets - paid off. That's when the man with the cell phone called an off-duty officer at home and told him that he was on foot on the east side following the guy he knew as "E."

While they talked, the officer radioed for police assistance. The man tracking "E" told the officer that the suspect ducked inside the rear of an abandoned building in the 13400 block of Greiner. Police swarmed in and arrested **Brooks** as he tried to run back outside.

Erwin, **Brooks**' lawyer, said she is anxious to hear from police and prosecutors about any links between her client and the slayings.

"I don't know whether there are forthcoming charges," she said. "Hopefully, we'll be talking about it soon."

Contact JIM SCHAEFER at 313-223-4542 or jschaefer@freepress.com.

(MAP)

Important sites in serial killer case

1 First victim linked to suspect by DNA was found here in January 2002.

2 Second victim was found here in April 2002.

3 Third victim was found here in November 2003.

4 Fourth victim was found here in October 2005.

5 Survivor was attacked here June 26.

6 Suspect was arrested here July 30.

Police reports

ILLUSTRATION: Map MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press

CAPTION: **Shelly Brooks** is "a person of interest."

MEMO: SIDEBAR ATTACHED;SEE MAP IN MICROFILM

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