

Expert blames serial killer

'Main South Woodsman' preying on prostitutes

Detectives investigating the deaths of five prostitutes from the Main South section of Worcester have never come out and said a serial killer is on the loose and preying on these women, although they have not ruled out that theory.

But while police seem reluctant to use the term "serial killer," at least one national expert on such crimes is not so reticent. John Kelly, profiler and president of the New Jersey-based System to Apprehend Lethal Killers, or STALK, is convinced there is a serial killer in the region and the man is comfortable in wooded environments.

The best way to find the killer, Mr. Kelly contends, is to create a formal, multi-agency task force such as the one formed to catch the Green River Killer in Seattle a few years ago. That task force consisted of detectives and investigators from local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies led by Frank Adamson, chief of criminal investigations in the King County sheriff's office in Seattle.

Mr. Adamson, who has since teamed up with Mr. Kelly at STALK, said significant resources need to be made available for these kinds of cases. A task force should be formed despite costs because the devastation and victimization outweigh the costs and outweigh the politics that may be involved, he said in an interview after the discovery of the first three women's bodies.

The group working on the murders of the five women, who were all known to work as prostitutes in the Main South neighborhood of Worcester, is much more loosely connected and less extensive than the Green River task force. Investigators from several police departments and agencies are sharing information in what they term an extremely active probe triggered by the discovery of skeletal remains of 34-year-old Lineida Olivera of Worcester last week in state-owned land abutting Rutland State Forest.

The investigations into three of the previous four murders were conducted under the jurisdiction of the Middlesex district attorney's office, formerly headed by Martha Coakley who has since become the state attorney general, because those three bodies were found in that county. The fourth body was found in Maine, so that investigation has been led by a separate authority. And since the Rutland discovery, the office of Worcester District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr., which had been part of the previous investigations under former District Attorney John J. Conte, has taken a leading role.

Neither the attorney general's office nor the FBI has assisted in any of the investigations. A spokeswoman for the FBI said Friday her agency rarely gets involved in murders, although the bureau would gladly offer resources if asked.

No one from the Middlesex district attorney's office, whose jurisdiction covers three of the areas where the bodies were found, returned calls from a reporter last week.

The investigators from local and state police departments in Worcester and Middlesex counties are focusing new attention on the Rutland discovery and are eager to learn whether it will offer any insight into the previous four killings.

Marlboro police are especially hopeful for new leads, Chief Mark Leonard said, because two previous victims' remains were found in that Middlesex County city.

"Everyone, obviously, has been talking about the evidence that may be uncovered in Rutland and we'll see if there's a connection," Chief Leonard said.

The Marlboro cases "are still very active," the chief said, "and that was prior to the Rutland discovery. Now, we and other agencies involved will be waiting to see if any more evidence comes up."

Investigators are keeping mum about any suspects they might have, although authorities are sharing information daily about potential leads, said Timothy J. Connolly, a spokesman for Mr. Early.

"The investigation is continuing, but we're not discussing possible suspects," Mr. Connolly said. "There's a lot going on as far as the investigation goes. There's a lot of cooperation.

"This find (in Rutland) has certainly led to detectives talking to each other," he continued. "It's extremely active."

The role of the Rutland Police Department has been to preserve the crime scene off Route 122 near the Oakham town line and to make sure potential evidence has not been disturbed, Mr. Connolly said.

While police in Central Massachusetts are sifting through the clues, Mr. Kelly of STALK is already convinced a serial killer is operating in the region and the dumping sites of all five of the women's bodies - in woods in Marlboro, Hudson, Rutland and York, Maine - indicate the killer may be a hunter. Mr. Kelly has dubbed the killer "the Main South Woodsman."

While law enforcement authorities initially said they were treating the discovery of Ms. Olivera's bones in Rutland Monday as isolated from the other deaths, Mr. Kelly said he believes the killer left Ms. Olivera in the Rutland woods to throw investigators off.

"This serial killer doesn't feel guilt or remorse," he said, "but like other serial killers, they feel extreme fear and terror when a body is found."

A series of questions are now going through the killer's mind, Mr. Kelly contended: "Did anyone see me with her? Did I drop any of my hair, or did any of it come off on her clothes, or is there any type of DNA sample that could be connected back to me? Did anyone see my vehicle or get my license plate?"

The last question is intriguing, considering some prostitutes in Worcester have been known to write down license plate numbers of customers and call those numbers in to friends in case something happens to them.

"She would take down plate numbers and say, 'If you don't see me in a couple days, call the police,'" a member of Ms. Olivera's family said in an earlier interview. Investigators were given those license plate numbers in order to track down the vehicles' owners.

"That could be a break in the case," said Mr. Kelly, who is currently working on an Atlantic City case in which several prostitutes were murdered. "If she didn't take down the plate number, she felt safe with this guy and didn't feel the need to do that."

While no evidence has yet been revealed by investigators that would tie the cases together, the five victims all shared certain traits, according to police. All had dark hair, eyes and skin, all were petite, all had drug problems, and all worked the streets of Worcester's depressed Main South neighborhood.

The skeletal remains of Betzaida Montalvo and Carmen Rudy were found on the grounds of Hillside School in Marlboro on Sept. 24 and 29, 2003, respectively. Dinelia Torres' skeleton was found on March 3, 2004, off Brigham Street in Hudson, a little more than a mile from the other two women. Wendy A. Morello's body was found on Sept. 13, 2004, in a 35-gallon trash can in Maine.

The state medical examiner listed "homicidal violence" and homicide as the cause and manner of death on the death certificates for Ms. Rudy and Ms. Montalvo. They were both 29, while Ms. Morello was 40 and Ms. Torres was 33.

Leaving Ms. Morello in Maine, far from Marlboro and Hudson, could also have been a way to throw off investigators, according to Mr. Kelly.

"He tried to lead everyone to believe he was not from the area or was leaving town," Mr. Kelly said. "That's why he left her where she could be found or seen."

Gary Ridgeway, the Green River Killer, who admitted in 2003 to killing 48 women in the Seattle area, buried his victims in clusters and moved bones from Washington to another state to throw off investigators.

All of the Central Massachusetts women were found in wooded areas. Ms. Montalvo's remains were found in a shallow grave and Ms. Rudy's remains were discovered 100 yards away just days later. Ms. Torres' remains were found about 40 feet off the road in Hudson, close to the Marlboro private school where the first two women's skeletons were discovered. The Maine victim's body was found by a man walking in the woods near a residential area. The remains of all four victims discovered in Massachusetts were also found in areas near water, which reinforces in Mr. Kelly's mind the idea that the killer is a hunter. Ms. Olivera was known to carry a screwdriver or knife as protection, and Mr. Kelly believes her killer was able to handle himself and could fend off a weapon attack.

"He is the ultimate hunter and predator," Mr. Kelly said. "This guy has been able to pick these girls that physically, in their looks, fit his fantasy and has been able to hunt them perfectly so far, because he hasn't been caught."

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