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Who killed teens? Police and parents think they know

By Bill Casper
staff writer

Two youths were brutally slain on a residential street just off Six Mile. No one was arrested, but the parents of the slain youths, Mario Maniscalchi and Sheryl Thornton of Redford Township, say they believe they know who is responsible. Redford police say that person is their prime suspect but they don't have sufficient evidence to press charges.

THE BODIES of Mario and Sheryl were found at Centralia and Six Mile, within a half mile of their homes. According to police, it appears that both teens, who were friends from school, got out of their car together to talk to someone they most likely knew.

As the assailant approached them from his car, Mario was struck in the lower back by a blunt instrument, possibly a tire jack, and he fell helpless to the ground.

SHERYL BEGAN to run but was felled a short distance away, cracked over the head with the same blunt instrument, police theorize. The assailant went back to his car and fled the scene. In the process, either purposely or by accident, he ran over Mario's body.

It was not until earlier this year that police disclosed that they have had a primary suspect in the case since the beginning of their investigation.

The parents say that a few months ago Redford detective Sgt. Gerald Schornack informed them of the threat of evidence he has had since the beginning of his investigation which makes one man a prime suspect.

PHILLIP MANISCALCHI and Jack

Thornton, parents of the slain youths, told the Observer that they were informed several months ago by Schornack about the evidence.

All he would say is that the evidence he does have is not sufficient to obtain a warrant charging the suspect with one or both of the homicides.

Maniscalchi and Thornton said they were told by Schornack that blood discovered on the suspect's car matches the blood type of the slain Maniscalchi, who was killed by being run over by an automobile.

The parents said Schornack told them that is not sufficient evidence to charge the suspect.

Although both Maniscalchi and Thornton believe there is still room for doubt, they tend to think the man in question is responsible for the death of their children.

"My wife and I feel 99 percent certain (this man) is responsible for killing Sheryl, but we realize that there will always be that shadow of doubt until someone is arrested and convicted," said Jack Thornton.

Schornack first told us (the suspect) was given two lie detector tests, one relating to Mario and the other relating to Sheryl, and passed them both," Thornton said. "Later, Schornack said that after seven experts had reviewed the lie detector tests, there was still some uncertainty whether (the suspect) had passed them.

"I'VE TALKED to friends of Sheryl, Mario and (the suspect) in an effort to put together the events on the night they were killed. But most of what their friends told me ended up as hearsay talk, although I do believe I caught (the suspect) in a lie as a result of one person I talked to," Thornton said.

Schornack said he, too, interviewed numerous friends of the victims and the suspect, but the information he received always led to dead ends.

"I'm extremely bitter about Sheryl's death and it's easy to get mad at Schornack, but rationally I realize he can't do much with what little evidence he has," Thornton said. "I really tend to believe he has done all he can.

"IT SEEMS like Mario and Sheryl stood behind a tree for five hours before they were killed because no one seems to have seen or knows anything," he said. "I talked with the people who live in the house closest to where Sheryl and Mario were killed. The people tell me they hear noises, car doors slamming and one car roar away, but they hear nothing.

"My wife and I have even invited (the suspect) over to our house on a number of occasions and he has accepted, but has never come. We've asked him if he has any idea who could have killed Sheryl and Mario and he says he doesn't have the slightest idea," Thornton said.

"THIS WHOLE thing is hard for me and my wife to understand and to cope with," he said. "If someone told me prior to her death that I would have to endure something like this, I would have told them it was impossible. But we have endured somehow because we're just average people and we have to. We have to pay the bills.

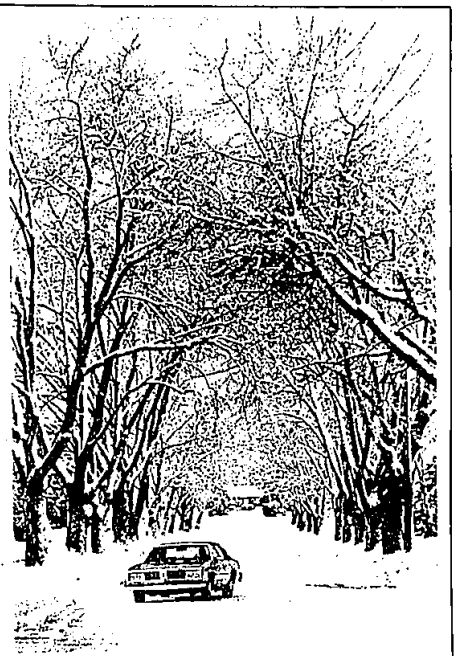
"We have care of my old son, Matt, to take care of and my wife's mother lives near us so we have a second home to tend to. Sometimes I can go for two or three hours without thinking about it. If I get real busy at work, but usually her death comes into my mind every 10 or 15 minutes," said Thornton.

Sheryl's older brother Mark, 23, shares his parents' grief and the frustration of believing he knows who killed his sister.

"KNOWING WHAT I know angers me, but I've got my own life to lead and I'm not going to look for (the suspect)," he said. "But I think it would make things easier for me and my parents if someone was arrested and convicted for killing my sister."

Maniscalchi feels the same way. "The loss of my son is always on my mind and it doesn't help to know who his killer may be, but I would feel 100 percent better if someone was arrested and convicted," said Maniscalchi. "In the meantime, I just go to church and visit Mario weekly at the cemetery. I pray and I hope his killer will be found and justice be done."

Schornack said there are two possible solutions to this case. "One is that the killer's conscious will get the best of him and he'll tell someone and that person will tell us," Schornack said. "The other is that someone did see what happened and will come forth and tell us. "I'm keeping tabs on him."



RANDY DORST/staff photographer

Get ready

You know its coming, like it or not, so now's the time to prepare for the inevitable. To make sure that this winter's first big snowfall doesn't catch you by surprise, turn to Page 24 of today's Observer for stories on coping with the white stuff. Incidentally, this was the snowy scene last year on Farmington's Alta Loma Street.

Hills endorses county park bid

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Farmington Hills City Council — as the result of a closed-door meeting — has informed state officials that the council would welcome a grant to fund a county park in the city.

The council has not held public hearings on the issue, which pertains to 211 acres of open land listed for sale in central Farmington Hills.

Many residents want the city itself to buy the property and develop a park, and opponents of the council's county-park plan have expressed dismay at council members who, as candidates, promised that city government would operate openly.

Opponents are upset because Hills city manager Lawrence Savage, in a letter received Tuesday by state Sen. Kerry Kammer, D-Clarkston, expressed the city's support of the county's grant request for the property. Kammer is author of the Kammer Land Trust act.

According to council members Jody Soronen and Jan Dolan, Savage was instructed by council during executive session on the Nov. 9 meeting to write the letter. Savage maintains, however, that he decided independently to inform the Land Trust board of council's position.

The Open Meetings Act allows governmental bodies to discuss real estate purchases in closed session, but it prohibits them from making decisions requesting someone to perform specific actions.

SORONEN SAID THAT "the council, I guess, said to Savage, 'write a letter to Kammer indicating that at the moment we would not fight the county in its efforts to get the grant.'"

"Obviously, if there were some dispute among (involved) governmental units, it could kill the whole thing. Mr. Savage was within the instruction of

the council, and I have no problem with him along those lines."

But Savage said Tuesday, "I reached the decision (to write the letter) a week ago. The council did not know a letter was drafted. I wrote it in my own office Wednesday (Nov. 24). I felt because the county is the only applicant (for the grant) that we should voice support."

"The position of the council," added Savage, "is that it would like to see the grant go to the county. They want to wait and see if the county gets it."

But Dolan said, "I'm sure (Savage was instructed by council to contact Kammer)," Dolan said, "because he wouldn't write a letter if the council didn't say 'yes, we think it's a good idea that the Kammer Trust funds be granted to the county to defray costs (incurred in purchasing the property).'"

That way, acquisition of the land doesn't require a large expenditure by the city or county, Dolan said.

THE OAKLAND County Parks and Recreation Commission applied in October for a state Kammer Land Trust grant, which would enable it to purchase the property off Farmington Road north of 10 Mile. Farmington Hills officials were the first to be approached by the property's owner, Nicholas Spicer, who contacted them about a sale shortly after the death of his mother, Eleanor, in June.

According to Savage, the city's present posture does not mean the city is refusing to purchase the land.

"This isn't to say we won't buy it, particularly if the state comes up with a grant. Then it would be a decision as to who (the city or county) should be the recipient, and that's something we'd have to discuss," he added.

County officials doubt whether their funding request will be granted when the Kammer Land Trust board meets on Tuesday.

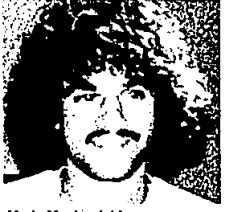
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Sheryl Thornton

'My wife and I feel 99 percent certain (this man) is responsible for killing Sheryl, but we realize that there will always be that shadow of doubt until someone is arrested and convicted.'

—Jack Thornton



Mario Maniscalchi

'This whole thing is hard for me and my wife to understand and to cope with. . . But we have endured somehow because we're just average people and we have to.'

—Phillip Maniscalchi

Blackmers sport winning look Teamwork unites football family

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

As the polka lyrics proclaim, the Polish enjoy their ale on earth because "in heaven there is no beer." The Blackmers of Farmington Hills are getting such an overdose of football on this planet that they might not mind if in heaven there is no gridiron.

And it's all because of prep All-American kicker David Blackmer, the sole returning player on this year's Harrison football squad. His field goal

in double overtime captured the State Class A championship Saturday against Dearborn. Fordson in the Pontiac Silverdome.

Harrison Coach John Herrington said he will need three players to replace Blackmer who is also a talented linebacker and fullback and apparently feels right at home in the Silverdome. Last year he helped propel the Hawks to a class B state championship in Pontiac.

The senior all-stater's brother Bill is a former Harrison tackle and now the Hawks' freshman football coach. He played for the 1976 Harrison squad that made it to the Silverdome but bowed 36-27 to Midland Dow.

Bill Blackmer's fiancée, Julie Adams of Lansing, is Harrison's athletic trainer.

Their dad and mentor, Bill, Sr., was a

starting lineman and kicker as a freshman at Eastern Michigan University back when it was called Michigan Normal. At Harrison, he assists with the videotaping and runs the clock for each game.

Sometimes described as the team mascot (den mother, good luck charm, chief cook, Roxanne Blackmer is a five-year member of Harrison's chain gang. Along the sidelines she's easily detected, replete with chains and yard-markers and dressed in Harrison-green knickers, sweater and hat.

HARRISON NINTH-GRADER Bar-

bara Blackmer lends sisterly support as a cheerleader, while Ginny, a 20-year-old music major at the University of Michigan, has served as football secretary.

"As a little kid in parochial school, I remember being taught that we sometimes pay for the sins of the poor souls in purgatory," said Roxanne.

"I think Ginny is buying our success. She's been in the hospital in Ann Arbor since Labor Day with an unusual infection."

Three days after the Hawks clinched

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"LIKE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPERS"

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ORAL QUARREL:

Should seat belts be mandatory?

Motorcyclists in Michigan are required to wear helmets, habits most ride in car seats and legislative attempts are afoot to require persons sitting in the front seat of automobiles to wear seatbelts.

State Rep. Ruth McNamee, R-Birmingham, wants Michigan to become the first state in the nation to make seatbelts mandatory with a \$10 civil fine for violators. Opponents call the move another regulation that infringes on civil liberties.

This week's Oral Quarrel question is: Would a law requiring persons to wear seatbelts save lives and should government pass laws to protect persons who don't want to be protected?

Please call 477-5498 from now until 1 p.m. Friday to give a 30-second anonymous response which will be taped. Responses will appear in Monday's Farmington Observer.



RANDY DORST/staff photographer

First class

Harrison High School students turned out Tuesday to celebrate their school's win in the Class A state football championships. Harrison defeated Dearborn Fordson 17-14 for the title Saturday. In addition to M.B. Dillon Ward's profile of kicker David Blackmer on this page, sports editor Tom Beer looks back on the season in a column on Page 2C of today's Observer.