

Task force closing shop; murder probe continues

By JOE MARTUCCI

The Oakland County Homicide Task Force will close its local headquarters next month. But no date has been set for ending the probe into the unsolved kidnap-slayings of four children in 1976 and 1977.

"Dec. 15 is the magic date," said Sgt. Wayne Waldron of the state police. All the files and so forth will be moved to the state police post in Northville.

The task force was first formed after the body of Kristine Mihelich of Berkeley was found in Franklin in January, 1977. The investigation expanded a few months later. In March, 1977, following the murder of Timothy King of Birmingham.

Since that time, the task force has been operating out of headquarters in the former Valley Woods School in Beverly Hills. With funding due to expire next month, the investigation will be moved to state police offices in Northville.

"We'll be meeting periodically, probably several times a month, after that date (Dec. 15) to pass out new tips that need to be looked into," Sgt. Waldron said.

Currently, eight investigators from the state police and six local departments are assigned to full-time task

force duty. This represents a substantial reduction in manpower from the early days of the task force, when federal and state law enforcement grants enabled more than 20 investigators to concentrate on solving the four child slayings.

THE GRANTS have long since expired, however, and the task force has had to reduce personnel to operate on contributions from local communities.

Sgt. Waldron said investigators would continue pursuing leads on a part-time basis through the winter. In the spring, a decision will be made on future state police involvement in the investigations. Local police departments, however, are expected to continue individual probes on a limited basis.

Local departments still involved in the task force include Birmingham, Troy, Southfield, Ferndale and Oak Park, in addition to the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

Although there was an upsurge this fall in the number of tips called into the task force, Sgt. Waldron said the clues have now dropped to "below 50 a week."

"Nothing fantastic has been coming in lately," said the state police investigators. "It's mostly look-alikes who resemble a composite sketch of

the suspect. One of the good things we have been doing is following up on anyone arrested for child offenses. If we weren't doing that, it probably wouldn't get done."

The upsurge in tips in September and October followed a request by the task force for help in locating a 1964-67 blue Pontiac Tempest. Police believe that vehicle was involved in at least one of the slayings. A blue American Motors Gremlin has also figured prominently in the King slaying.

STATE POLICE have made no decision on destroying computer data relating to the probe, Sgt. Waldron said. To date, the task force computer contains 15,400 tips, 15,300 of which have been cleared by investigators.

Some persons turned in as suspects and later cleared of any involvement in the slayings, have reportedly objected about potential abuse of the computerized data.

State police don't want to destroy the files while the investigation is active because it could save time needed to re-trace steps if new information on a suspect is developed, Sgt. Waldron said.

If the slayings are solved or the day comes when no agency is investigating any of the killings, state police will probably be taken to court by someone who wants the files destroyed, Sgt. Waldron speculated.

Asked for his personal theory on what's happened to the killer, Waldron said, "I think he's dead or moved away or locked up someplace."

The slayings being probed are those of Mark Stebbins of Ferndale, found in Southfield in Feb., 1976; Jill Robinson of Royal Oak, found in Troy in Dec. 1976; Kristine Mihelich of Berkeley, found in Franklin in Jan. 1977 and Timothy King of Birmingham, found in Livonia in March of 1977.

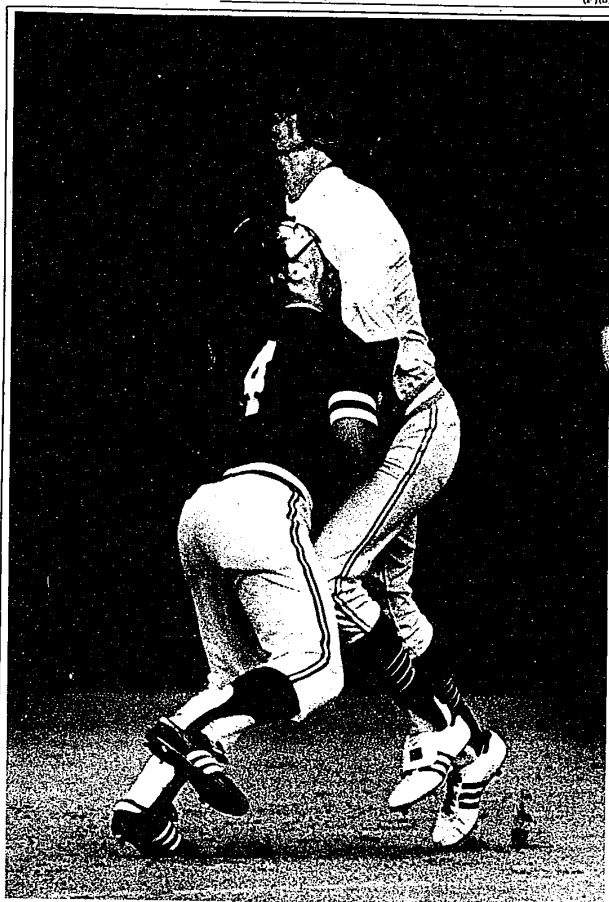
The children were between 10 and 12 years of age and were held captive for several days before being murdered.

A \$100,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the persons responsible remains in effect.

Police say the suspect:

- Is 25-30 years of age, 5'8" to 5'10" tall; 150 to 170 pounds with an athletic build.
- May be living with or associating closely with another person.
- Is acquainted with Oakland County.

- Has a job which allows freedom of movement.
- Lives in or has access to an area where he could keep a hostage without creating suspicion.



It's a winner

This photo, entitled "Pardon Me" and taken by Southfield Eccentric staff photographer Gary Friedman, placed second in the Best Sports Picture Category of the National Newspaper Association's annual newspaper competition. The contest includes all news-

papers in the country with a circulation of 5,000 or more. The photo was taken in May 1977 at the Southfield High School baseball game. Friedman also placed second in the same category last year.

Santa arrives in Birmingham

You better watch out, you better not pout, you better not cry, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to the high rent district of town.

The jolly old fellow will still be arriving on his usual conveyance—a shiny red fire engine.

But, for the first time, he'll be coming to the corner of Henrietta Street and Maple Avenue.

In years past, Santa came to the city hall lawn. But this year his house has been moved to the new location to make Santa more accessible to shoppers in downtown Birmingham, city officials said.

The arrival is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 25, at 10 a.m.—thanks to the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce.

The city commission has agreed to close Henrietta from Maple to the Michigan Bell building, and the street will be re-named "Santa's Lane" for the next month.

Santa's arrival will also be celebrated by clowns from the Emmet

Kelly Jr. Circus, which will be performing at the Birmingham Theatre Nov. 24-25. Several of the clowns from the renowned circus troupe will accompany Santa on his journey to his new home.

Santa will be accepting visitors Monday through Saturday, from noon to 5 p.m., until Dec. 23.

"Santa doesn't work on Sundays," advised chairman of commerce executive director James Zeder.

Other signs of Christmas will soon become evident in Birmingham.

Christmas lights and wreaths should be in place by today, and some downtown merchants will begin extended shopping hours Dec. 1.

Several stores will remain open until 9 p.m. Monday-Friday, and until 5:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Animals receive blessing in church service

By JUDITH COX

It wasn't a typical Sunday service. True, the Reverend John Albrecht of Birmingham was in his usual place behind the pulpit at St. Mary's-In-The-Hills Episcopal Church in Lake Orion.

And the congregation listened and sang as they usually do.

But sitting quietly, or at least fairly quietly, on the pews among the usual parishioners were 22 dogs, 10 cats and two birds.

The well-behaved menagerie was gathered for the second annual Parade and Blessing of the Animals held Sunday. Following a necessarily brief sermon, the pets were escorted one by one to the center aisle of the church to receive the blessing with holy water.

The blessing, "acknowledges that all creatures are created by God," Albrecht said.

"We bless all God's creatures, whatever they may be, because they have been given to us as means of comfort and beasts of burden," he told the congregation.

Albrecht originated the service last year as part of the church's 25th anniversary celebration. "We did it primarily for the kids," he said, "but we found the adults really like it too."

The Albrechts' cat was one of the animals blessed on Sunday. Last year they also brought their dog, but he was killed over the summer. "I'm glad now that we had him blessed," Albrecht said.

"IT'S FUN," he said, "but more than that. Many people are very close to their animals. This affirms their relationship with their pet."

The blessing of animals is a tradition which dates back to the Middle Ages

when hounds were blessed before a fox hunt, the reverend explained.

Singing the hymn, "All creatures great and small," the congregation and their pets marched outside where Albrecht closed the service by administering the blessing to Dolly and Daisy, two ponies.

The Reverend Albrecht enjoys a reputation of being an innovator. Last year he conducted "the world's shortest sermon," the word "Love."

Recently, he started a second profession by taking the New York Stock Exchange broker exam and joining the firm of Shearson Hayden Stone in Southfield. He explained that pressures on the budget make full-time pursuit of the ministry impossible.

"Inflation is really hurting us," he said. "Many clergy are going to become worker-priests, to become

partially self-supporting." "The stock market has been my avocation for thirty years," he added.

Albrecht and his wife, Mimi, an assistant attorney general for the state of Michigan, have five children and live in Birmingham.

Recently elected president of the Cranbrook School Alumni Association,

Bloomfield Hills, he is also president of the State of Michigan Board for Marriage Counselors.

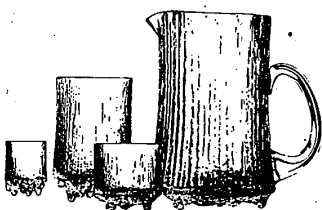
He was rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, Royal Oak, from 1969 to 1973; rector of St. Catherine's Episcopal Church, Williamston, from 1963 to 1969 and was a member of the clergy staff at Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, from 1959 to 1965.

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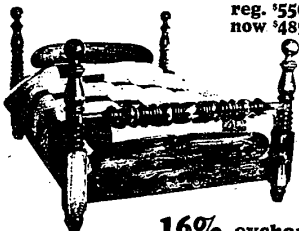
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