

NEWS-PRESS Charlotte

Reports From Staff Writers, Bureaus And Wire Services

SECTION B THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1979

Increase reported in county crime rate

By PETER G. JOHNSON
Crime Bureau Staff
PUNTA GORDA — The total number of crimes reported in Charlotte County decreased slightly in 1978 from the previous year, according to official statistics.

These categories were rape, robbery, kidnapping and auto theft. There were, however, more murders, assaults and burglaries recorded in 1978 than in 1977.

At July 1, 1977, the University of Florida showed Charlotte County had a population of 44,311. A year later the population had ballooned to 50,311.

People are starting to call us because they see something that looks a little suspicious they give us a call. As a case in point, LeBoau noted that lawmen became aware of a double murder in August after a neighbor reported that things didn't look right at the Port Char-

lotte home of Harry and Margaret Walsh. That double murder and the murder of a 13-year-old schoolgirl were the only ones recorded in Charlotte County in 1978. However, that was an increase of one from the previous year.

Murder probe continues

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Although men from three months have passed since 12-year-old Linda Poluzic was abducted and burned to death, Sheriff's department investigators remain confident they will catch her killer.

"Murder cases aren't easy. They take time, some more than others," said Lt. William Clement, chief investigator for the Charlotte County Sheriff's Department.

The Port Charlotte seventh-grade student was abducted on her way home from a local convenience store that burned to death in a field Oct. 13.

In the past month, Clement said, his department has gathered additional information on the case. He declined to elaborate on the nature of the new information.

He also said Wednesday the lie detector test again is being used in the case but would not say who has been tested recently.

Charges were dropped Jan. 11 against Phillip Lee Drake, who was accused of giving false information to authorities investigating the murder.

Drake, 26, of 1101 Orlando Blvd. Port Charlotte, was charged with perjury in November after officials found evidence indicating he had lied in seven testimony given to Assistant State Attorney Eugene Berry.

Berry dropped the perjury charge but would not explain why he did so.

According to court records, Drake had denied being the 1972 white Chevrolet to anyone on the road and on the two following days.

But Sheriff Alan LeBoau said investigators obtained evidence Drake had loaned his car to friends on Oct. 11, 13 and 14.

At the time of Drake's arrest in November, LeBoau also said there had been a report of a white or light-colored car being seen in the area where Linda was abducted.

Two investigators, one-third of the original six-man team, continue to sift through testimony and evidence gathered during the more than three months since the crime was committed.

"Things could be brighter," Clement said, "but we're working on it."

He added that the murder is now virtually "out of the public eye. A lot of people have forgotten about it but we haven't and we won't."



News-Press/Kevin Bloom

Crashing waves Peace River into whitecaps and heavy winds and high tides swayed a tamarac early Wednesday in southern Lee County that whipped the broad mouth of the Peace Gorda. The violent weather aged 8 other homes

Gunman holds up 7-Eleven

By PETER G. JOHNSON
Crime Bureau Staff

PUNTA GORDA — Police are searching for a young man who robbed a local convenience store of an undetermined amount of cash Tuesday night after threatening to blow the clerk's head off, lawmen said.

The robbery was the second of the day in Punta Gorda and occurred just about eight hours after the first.

Although an arrest had been made in the first case by the time the second robbery occurred, police say they are investigating the possibility the two might be related.

According to Det. Sgt. Mike Gandy of the Punta Gorda Police Department, the second robbery occurred shortly before 11:30 p.m. Tuesday at the 7-Eleven store at the intersection of U.S. 41 and Virginia Street.

Gandy said a young white man walked into the store with his hands in his coat pocket. He approached the night clerk and indicated he had a gun in his pocket.

The man demanded the clerk put all the store's money in a paper bag or the man said he would blow the clerk's head off, Gandy said.

The clerk complied and the man fled on foot out the front door. He disappeared around the side of the building and was last seen heading west on Virginia, Gandy said.

The robber was described as a white male in his early 20s who stood about 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighed about 140 pounds. The man had a medium build, dirty blond hair, a moustache, bushy eyebrows and a thin face, according to Gandy.

The robber was last seen wearing a green jacket which may have been an Army jacket — green pants and an olive green, floppy hat.

Late Wednesday afternoon, Lt. Robert Shires said police have a suspect in mind but no arrest had been made.

About eight hours before the robbery at the 7-Eleven, a man wielding a four-inch knife robbed Taylor Drugs, Inc. of a bottle of morphine-based pain killers.

A few hours later, police arrested John A. Hogg, 26, of Charlotte Harbor and charged him with the armed robbery.

The drug store was robbed by a man wearing a red wig, sunglasses and a baseball cap. He also was carrying a blue bag with a gold drawing into which he dropped the bottle of pills, according to Shires.

Moments after the robbery, Hogg was found near the Peace River behind the Municipal Trailer Park, not far from the drug store.

Shires said police now have recovered the pills, wig, sunglasses, cap and blue bag. According to police, the robber told the drug store employees that an accomplice was waiting outside with a gun. Police said they still are not sure if a second suspect was involved.

North Port Commissioner sues recall proponents

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

NORTH PORT — City Commissioner Joan Morgan has filed suit against a group of North Port residents who are seeking her recall, she said Wednesday.

The suit, which was filed last week with the 12th Judicial Circuit Court, charges the Committee for Good Government, a group seeking Mrs. Morgan's removal from office, with implying that she had accepted a bribe.

The charge stems from a statement read at a news conference Dec. 12 by Abraham Verman, publicity chairman for the committee, but the suit was filed against Verman and five other members of the group: James Gentry, Victor Scullin, Herman Bergman, Katherine Gietka and Marshall Van Doren.

According to Mrs. Morgan, Verman read a statement prepared by committee members which alluded to a mayor who had been convicted of accepting bribes

and implying that Mrs. Morgan had done the same thing. A recall election on Mrs. Morgan is set for Tuesday.

The Committee for Good Government has charged Mrs. Morgan with the following:

• Falsely accusing the mayor (Margaret Gentry) of criminal acts regarding a federal grant.

• Violation of the Sunshine Law in an appointment of a sanitation commissioner, and lecturing her (Mrs. Morgan) husband to threaten a private citizen.

The Sunshine Law states that governmental meetings should be held with the public present. The charges against her are unfounded, Mrs. Morgan said.

"It's just a power play," she said. "Former commissioner Abe Verman wants to get back in office." Mrs. Morgan defeated Verman in the November 1977 city commission election. Verman said Mrs. Morgan's "general inefficiency" was the basis for the recall.

Inside Today's B-Section

A 26-year-old unemployed driver released from a state mental hospital eight months ago is arrested after a security guard is disarmed and that to death with his own gun in the elevator of the federal building in Tampa, police say.

STATE REP. Tom McPherson says he will recommend federal officials reject a plan to improve air quality in nine Florida counties — even though it could mean the loss of federal grant money.

PATRICIA McLEAN Abbott and Roy Gambrell were co-conspirators who arranged and paid for the escape of convicted promiscuous Michael Thavis from an Indian jail, government prosecutors say, however, defense attorneys portray the two as victims of Thavis.

THREE STATE SENATORS battling the Sunshine Amendment's financial disclosure requirements are "absolutely positive" they are right despite repeated defeats in court, their lawyer says.

IT IS "MORALLY upright" for men and women firefighters to share the same bedroom and bathroom facilities, says the wife of a Jacksonville fireman.

Dredge savings sink in paperwork

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Governmental paperwork will not be complete in time for Pompano Inlet to be dredged at a financial saving to the city, officials said Wednesday.

City Engineer Robert French said he was hoping the state Department of Environmental Regulation (DER) would approve a modification in the city's dredging permit for Pompano Inlet before the dredging company moved its equipment from Bays Inlet.

Bays Inlet is just north of Pompano Inlet.

Pompano Dredging Co., a Palm-Beach-based firm, just completed the dredging of Bays Inlet. Because the equipment already is near the Pompano site, the city would save about half the cost, or between \$10,000 and \$15,000, by dredging now, according to Deputy City Engineer Tom Rader.

The Punta Gorda City Council Turn To DREDGE, Page 3B