

NEWS-PRESS Charlotte

Reports From Staff Writers,
Bureaus And Wire Services

SECTION 8 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 1979

Girl's murderer is still being sought

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PORT CHARLOTTE — Almost \$4,000 sits in a Port Charlotte bank account. It is the unclaimed reward for information leading to the capture of Linda Pikuritz's murderer. On Thursday it will be six months since the 12-year-old was abducted and burned to death.

It is a case unsolved. Charlotte County Sheriff Alan LeBouss said this week that solving the crime is "still not number one priority."

One source close to the investigation told the News-Press the case had led lawmen to one suspect, now living out-of-state, who remains free because of insufficient evidence against him.

"That theory looked real good for a while," LeBouss said, "but it doesn't anymore. That person is still under consideration but there are a number of suspects right now."

He said the number is "more than one and less than a dozen."

Two weeks ago, investigator Tom Burns was taken off the case and replaced by Deputy Jim Jones, formerly a homicide investigator with the Seminole County Sheriff's Department.

Explaining his reasons for switching the officers, LeBouss said, "Sometimes you get too close to an investigation, you can't see the forest for the trees. Jones has uncovered a couple of rocks that were returned before. He's working on it every day, going from A to Z on the case again. I feel confident the perpetrator will be found."

There are still questions, however, that LeBouss and his men will not — or cannot — answer. They do not know what happened to the blood, seventh grade on Oct. 12 between 7:15 p.m., when she was abducted, and midnight, when her charred body was found by firefighters called to put out what they thought was a brush fire. In reality, it was Linda's funeral pyre.

One source close to the investigation theorized that the murderer accidentally struck Linda as she was riding her bicycle home from the L1 General Store on U.S. 1 at Midway Boulevard.

Panic-stricken at the sight of the injured young girl, the killer disposed of Linda's bicycle on East Broad Ranch Drive and, several hours later, burned her to death in a field on Tipton Street, an undeveloped section of Port Charlotte.

Another source close to the investigation believes Linda was knocked unconscious soon after the killer stopped his car to talk with her. He believes the killer wouldn't have been able to drive the car and restrain the girl at the same time.

Charlotte County Medical Examiner Dr. Peter Tava reported signs of sexual abuse. He attributes Linda's broken arm to the fire which killed her but said it is still possible she was hurt before the burning.

On the evening of Oct. 12, Linda and her eight-year-old neighbor, Vinnie Nave, were bicycling near their homes on Albany Circle in Port Charlotte. When Vinnie asked her parents if she could ride to the store



LINDA PIKURITZ
... Sheriff LeBouss says finding her murderer is still his department's No. 1 priority.

with Linda, her parents said so. Shortly after 4:30 p.m., Vinnie returned home and Linda began her bicycle trip to the store. Linda was not permitted to bicycle on Midway

she rode alone, reached the store and began the trip home. A short distance from the store, a friend, Windy Goldsmith, spotted Linda.

"We were going to the store, me and some friends, and we saw her near Elliott (a road which bisects Midway) Lane," 10' and Linda said. "She was screaming!" The store was about 7:15 p.m. It was still daylight. Windy Goldsmith was one of the last persons to see Linda alive, except for the killer.

At 7:30 p.m., Linda's sister, Deborah Pikuritz Bianchi, notified the sheriff's office that Linda was missing.

Shortly before midnight, her body was found.

In the six months that have passed since Linda's death, the fear that gripped Charlotte County parents has gradually waned.

More than 300 families have banded together to form the Helping Hand program, a child-protection network. Large, red cardboard bands, displayed in front windows indicate a "safe-house" in which a youngster can take refuge if he or she needs it.

A helpful hand was in the window of the Pikuritz family's home.

Sheriff's department officials have released only scanty information about the murder and their findings.

Polygraph tests were administered to several suspects — including a 13-year-old boy. LeBouss also used hypnosis on several witnesses and an arrest was made.

Phillip Lee Drake, 30, of 1181 Orlando Blvd., was arrested a month after the murder and charged with perjury after authorities said he gave false information regarding the murder.

According to court records, Drake denied leaving his 1972 white Chevrolet to anyone on the day Linda was murdered. LeBouss said at the time that his department had learned that Drake did leave his car in friends on that day and the two following days.

The charges against Drake later were dropped.

L. William Clement, chief investigator for the sheriff's office, said a psychological profile of the killer indicates that, unlike most murderers, this one is not a braggart and that fact, as much as anything, is hampering investigators in their efforts to catch him.

Psychologist told Clement the unknown killer might be the type of person who has sucked the murder into his subconsciousness and forgotten it.

So, in some form, was involved in the crime. Clement said, although no signs of sexual assault were found.

"Something in the background of this type of person will cause them to kill and it's usually sexual," he said. "Sexual frustration can bring out strange or violent behavior."

Many of the unanswered questions will be solved, LeBouss maintains, with continued work on the case and the continuing cooperation of the public, which, he said, "has been great in this case."

Six months after Linda's brutal death by fire, however, the case remains unsolved and the killer, described by LeBouss as a "rich, white" remains free.

Emergency dialing system's effectiveness questioned

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — The effectiveness of the county's 911 emergency dialing system has been questioned by the county's Fire Prevention Bureau director.

Alan Wilson said county commissioners the system has a major flaw precluding it from being a "total communications network."

The problem, according to Wilson, is that the system does not of-

fer two-way communications between the sheriff's department, which takes emergency calls, and fire trucks which are dispatched.

A person encountering an emergency situation has only to dial 911 for police, ambulance or fire assistance.

In the case of the county, the calls go directly to the sheriff's department, which notifies the desired service.

If a fire is reported, the sheriff's department tells the appropriate fire district and the district dispatches its trucks.

Problems arise, Wilson said, when firefighters are dispatched, because once on the road, the fire trucks have no means of communicating with the sheriff's department.

This poses problems because if the firefighters need a sheriff's deputy or an ambulance at the scene, they have no way of contacting the sheriff's department.

Turn To PROBLEM, Page 18

Inside Today's B-Section

- THE REPUBLICAN Tax Reform Task Force unanimously endorses a plan that would give \$100 tax rebates to each Florida homeowner. **5B**
- A RELUCTANT Insurance Commissioner Bill Guter would be given new regulatory powers over Florida hospitals and hospital insurance carriers under a surprise bill that surfaced — and is unanimously passed — by a Senate committee. **6B**
- AFTER A COMMENTARY by Speaker Hyatt Brown, House Democrats vote unanimously to designate Ralph Hubbs as speaker for 1981-82. **6B**
- THE SENATE passes a bill to let the Parole and Probation Commission release inmates from prison without a majority vote by the seven-member commission. **7B**
- FRESHMAN REP. Boley (R) Johnson, D-Port Walton Beach, says he is seeking support for a bill that would require railroad companies to pay all public and private costs resulting from derailment. **18**
- THE FLORIDA House puts its stamp of approval on a workmen's compensation bill that proposes to reduce operating premiums to Florida employers at least 10 percent by changing the way injured workers are compensated. **18B**
- A SENATE committee modifies a controversial bill dealing with regulation of 25 professions by restoring self-regulation that reformers had advocated taking away. **18B**



A swinging time
Charlotte gets a new slant on things at Higley Squares Tennis and Marcy Ridgely of Port, Park playground.

Enforcement of animal laws said needed to prevent rabies

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Tighter enforcement of leash laws and licensing of domestic animals is necessary to hedge against the spread of rabies, according to the county's health director.

Dr. Edward Vanderhoef said county commissioners Tuesday that it is time to "buckle down on the public. By that I mean tags, licensing and continued vaccinations on a regular basis."

Vanderhoef said the discovery of a rabid raccoon in Punta Gorda late in March should not be considered alarming. But, he said, it prompted the health department to review existing

rabies control methods.

"Enforcement is the biggest problem," Vanderhoef said, "we have one man for animal control for the entire county, which he can not cover."

To correct the situation, Vanderhoef urged the commission to hire another officer in next year's budget and another vehicle for transporting animals.

"The long end at the moment is the need for another man, with a vehicle," Vanderhoef said. "The real ones would be able to tighten down and you can't be too easy on the public in this he said, it prompted the health department to review existing

Apartments to get new locks, doors

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Aluminum doors and deadbolt locks will be installed in 127

Punta Gorda Housing Authority apartments soon.

The housing authority has received \$32,000 in modernization funds from the

Commission rejects proposed measure to allow outsiders on building board

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — An ordinance that would have allowed members of the building board to live outside of Charlotte County was rejected by county commissioners Tuesday.

Commission Chairman Joseph Triggall, who has been unable to find an appointee for his district to fill a vacancy on the board.

The membership of the board is dictated by an ordinance which stipulates which tracts will be represented.

Turn To BOARD, Page 18