

## Suspect but not evidence found in murder

By KEVIN BROWN  
News-Press Bureau

PORT CHARLOTTE — The case against a prime suspect in the 1978 murder of 12-year-old Linda Pizarra is not strong enough to warrant a conviction, according to State Attorney Joseph D'Allesandro.

The case was handed over to D'Allesandro more than one month ago for his evaluation after Charles County Assistant State Attorney Gene Berry told sheriff's investigators he did not believe the case could be proven.

Neither D'Allesandro, Berry or Sheriff Alvin Lelless would identify the man they believe was first in the Port Charlotte girl in a remote field in October 1978.

Lelless said he is aware of D'Allesandro's position on the case and said "We'll just have to keep at it."

"We know who did it and we feel good about that," Lelless said. "We're hoping he slips up."

D'Allesandro said, "There's not enough evidence to proceed. They have a good suspect but basically the bottom line is there isn't enough evidence to prosecute anybody."

The state attorney said a major problem with the case so far is that it depends heavily on circumstantial (indirect) evidence.

D'Allesandro said it would be "difficult or impossible" to get the indirect evidence introduced in court.

### Michael Sanders in serious condition

Michael C. Sanders, the son and working partner of prominent local businessman George Sanders, was killed in a serious condition at Fort Myers Community Hospital Tuesday night following his weekend car accident.

His father, George Sanders, 63, was never married, right. Following surgery on Saturday for internal injuries he received in a car accident just east of Fort Myers on State Road 1.

Sanders, of 3427 McGregor Blvd. in Fort Myers, was driving west of State Road 1 at about 11:30 a.m. when he struck the corner and struck a car driven by 30-year-old Robert Earl Joyner, of 2000 Buca St. in Fort Myers, according to the Lee County Sheriff's Department.

Joyner was treated for minor injuries at Latham General Hospital and released Saturday.

Michael Sanders is the youngest son of Edison Mall developer and former owner George Sanders Sr.

He also said there were other problems with the case which he would not elaborate.

D'Allesandro continued he has made some recommendations to investigators on how to proceed with the case.

St. Jim Jones, chief investigator for the sheriff's department who was assigned to the Pizarra case more than one year ago, said "We're going to proceed with what we have."

"If we just had that one piece of hard evidence, we'd go like thunder," Jones said. "We really need an eye witness."

The Pizarra case is one of two unsolved homicides currently under investigation in Charlotte County. The second is the murder of convenience store clerk Adelle Easter.

Jones said he is waiting for a laboratory report of evidence believed to be linked with the Pizarra murder and that evidence could have a strong impact on a decision to take the suspect to trial.

Referring to said what that evidence is, Jones said, "We still get a few lines on the far left yet. We're gonna run them for all their worth."

Much of the difficulty with the case, according to those familiar with it, was the crime scene. The girl had been seated with a flammable substance on the substance ignited.

Her body was discovered by a firefighter called to the scene of a brush fire off Tigard Street, near where it intersects Toledo Blade Road.

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About a month before Clement left, the case was assigned to Jones.

The chief investigator said Tuesday he is not discouraged by D'Allesandro's decision.

"It's the prosecutor, he knows if it's going to hold up or not," Jones said. "We're going to keep battling at it."

The investigations also changed hands six months after it began.

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