

4B DES MOINES REGISTER SEPTEMBER 5, 1993

# Six teens charged in rape, slaying

## SLAYING

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pen to my kid.  
"Part of the problem when we started our gang program was convincing people that a gang member's not just a poor, hooded black kid. Sadly, we knew there would be some kind of violent action that would make people start to become aware, but we didn't think it was going to be that bad."

Kullbacker believes as many as 2,000 youths are involved with gangs, although perhaps 500 to 600 of them would be classified as "hard core," said Kullbacker. The five "national" gangs include the Vice Lords, Latin Kings, Black Gangster Disciples and the Low Riders. About 19 "transitional" gangs have been identified too.

### Unlikely Target

Michelle Jensen was a unlikely target for gang violence. "Her father is an electrician. She worked part time with her mother, Cheryl, at a key and repairing service. She and her sister, Vanessa, 14, lived with their family in a three-unit neighborhood on Daversport's southwest side. Rick and Cheryl Jensen celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary this summer with a re-enactment of their wedding vows.

"She was the exact opposite of what a kid who hangs with the gangs would be, with her grades and her music," said Kullbacker.

The Rev. Ginger Anderson-Larsen, in her former sermon, said although the tragedy is every parent's worst fear, children cannot be locked up in homes in hopes of keeping them safe.

Jensen's death occurred a few days before the death of three other teenagers before the Daversport City Council on Wednesday night. At Rick Jensen's at his daughter's, and Vanessa Jensen, 16, of Columbus and Mayer Pat Gibbs to a husband City Council.

"Grieved, a curfew is not going to solve all our problems in the city, but it's definitely a start," Anne Jensen said. "I had hoped that there was a curfew, would Michelle still be alive? Would the party have been over earlier and everyone go home? Maybe not. But at least the possibility of being caught driving on the roads after curfew, a curfew may have spotted them and stopped the car."



Michelle Jensen, Unlikely target

"Just think about this. None of us are supermen. Or superwomen. It only takes one mistake and one bullet and they're gone. Believe me, I know."

The ordinance, which offers warnings and fines for minors and their parents, will go into effect on the third reading Sept. 13 if passed by two-thirds of the council. The second vote was 8 to 1.

### Her Last Hours

Court records detail the grisly facts of Jensen's last hours.

At the party, held just a few blocks from her home, was Jason Brown, 17. Then Jensen had invited him and another boy to a family party.

"They were the perfect guests," said Rick Jensen. "We didn't see the signs."  
Also at the party were Anthony Black, 17, Joe Hager, 19, Christopher Folgenhauser, 18, Shawn Schewe, 17, all of Daversport, and Justin Bowers, 18, of Columbus and two or three other young women. Everyone was drinking heavily, although no drugs appear to have been present.

During the evening, the men discussed getting Jensen's 1982 Ford Ford Escort to use in the robbery of the nearby Kwik Shop on Rockingham Road and "taking it from her by use or force," said an affidavit.

After Jensen became intoxicated, Hock, Schewe and Vollers usually showed her and Hock

"instructed Folgenhauser to strike her with an electric fan, which Hock handed to him in order to knock her out and allow her car keys to be acquired. This was done but the victim did not lose consciousness," said the affidavit.

"After that, Hock got out a sawed-off shotgun and headed to the Means and directed him to use it on the victim if necessary," said the affidavit. Telling Jensen they were taking her home, Means and Vollers instead took her to a rural area about two miles southwest of Daversport about 1 a.m.

"Hock shot her once in the back of the head," said the affidavit. "While Means and Vollers were doing this, Hager and Folgenhauser were running around to be heard."

Means and Vollers returned to the scene, jumped on the other four, and all six drove back to where Jensen's body had been left in the middle of the road to take her away and view the crime, the affidavit said.

### Officers at the Scene

But three young men, but not looking for a party, had found Jensen's body within 20 minutes and Scott County and Daversport officers were already on the scene, the affidavit said.

"We were very fortunate they were not scared," said Rick Jensen. "See 200 yards down the road is a deep ravine. If they left her body there, we'd still be looking."

The Scott County Sheriff's Department and the Daversport police had all six suspects in custody by 4 a.m. Sunday. Officials said none showed any remorse.

"These guys have no conscience," said Capt. Dennis Conner of the sheriff's department.

At Jensen's funeral home filled up the Jensen home Thursday afternoon. Rick Jensen was deep in a well of mourning that only other families of farm families can know.

"Adults and kids alike have got to realize our lives are expendable," said Jensen. "You get with the wrong crowd and your life can be gone in a snap. Of course there are people who don't care if their kids live or die and that's tragic."

As a thank-you message to Jensen, Jensen fell silent for a moment. Turning his head, he murmured an "amazingly beautiful" woman.

By then so much hate in this world."



Rick Jensen, right, talks with brother-in-law Dave Dittmer on the Scott County road where Jensen's daughter, Michelle, was found slain Sunday. Dittmer set the cross in the ditch the next day.



Means, Hock, Hager, Folgenhauser, Schewe, Vollers

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The Des Moines Register

# Labor Day killing remains a puzzle

## Friends, family in New Hampton keep hope alive

By JACK HOWELL  
On the Occasion of a Woman's Murder

One year and several hundred investigative interviews later, authorities in Chickasaw County still are probing for answers in the 1992 Labor Day slaying of a 22-year-old woman in the convenience store where her work ended through the night.

And, every day for the past year, Mary Knutson has awakened in the morning and retired at night with the same questions: Who killed her daughter, Rhonda, at the Williamson Store six miles south of New Hampton, and why?

Rhonda Knutson died from blows to her head inflicted by a blunt instrument that never been found, no robbery occurred at the busy convenience store near the intersection of heavily traveled U.S. Highway 63 and 18, nor was there evidence of a sexual attack.

The young woman's body was found at 4:41 a.m. last Labor Day in a back room at the store. She had been beaten brutally earlier that morning, investigators said.

**Zywicki Comparison**  
"The slaying was quickly compared to the disappearance and murder two weeks earlier of Grinnell student Tammy Zywicki, whose body later was found near a highway in Missouri. She vanished after her car stalled in Illinois on Interstate Highway 90.

Authorities suspected a trucker may have been involved in the Zywicki case. The same possibility was raised in the Knutson killing in case of its proximity to two major highways that have considerable truck traffic and reports that trucks were seen at the store around the time of the slaying.

Coincidentally, Rhonda Knutson's father, John, is a trucker who had paid special attention to the Zywicki case because of his occupation.

"He had remarked about what a terrible thing it was for the parents of that girl, then all of a sudden it's in my ways think it only happens to someone else," Mary Knutson said.

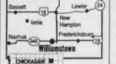
"Now it's the first thing I think of when I wake up in the morning and the last thing I think of before going to sleep at night."

**'Holiday Killer'?**  
Even broader speculation has been that the Knutson murder could be linked as a "holiday killer" crime to a pair of unsolved murders in Waverly, 25 miles southwest of the Williamson Store.

Julia Ann Bennett, 18, a Waverly cocktail waitress, disappeared the day after Thanksgiving in 1975, and her body was found four months later in a ditch near Shell Rock. Waurburg College sophomore

## SLAYING

Investigations have been unable to solve the disappearance of Rhonda Knutson, 22, a clerk at the Williamson Store.



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Shortly after Knutson's death authorities released the drawings of two men they believe were among the last people to see her alive. Both were identified as truck drivers. Authorities said the men weren't necessarily suspects.

**Reward Fund**  
More than \$12,000 has been donated to a reward fund for information leading to the capture and conviction of Knutson's killer.

"I had her number," he is not a letter that I want to see him punished severely. But, I would like to be able to ask him why he did what he did to our daughter, why he took away so much of our life. She was our baby daughter."

The Knutsons have six other children, the oldest 33.

Rhonda Knutson, originally of New Hampton, and Alan Wolf of Tipton had dated for three years and lived together the last two years of her life.

As part of their routine investigation, police had a possible suspect, but people who know the pair

well — including Knutson's parents — said that it seemed because of their devotion to each other.

"It has always seemed like one of us," Mary Knutson said.

"We could not be reached for comment, but in past interviews he said he and Knutson never fought physically or verbally, and they planned to be married in the spring of 1993."

**Candlelight Ceremony**  
Two of Rhonda Knutson's friends, Amy Nargang and Dawn Palmer, have arranged a candlelight ceremony tonight at New Hampton's Memorial Park in memory of the slain woman.

"We've done it to show support for the family and make sure the town doesn't forget," Nargang said.

"What really prompted it," she said, "was that we were watching a TV newscast about the murder of 16-year-old John's father and the arrest right away of two boys. I said to Dawn, 'It's just too bad that Rhonda wasn't rich and famous, maybe they'd have gotten her murderer right away too. Her murder sent shock waves through the community. There has to be someone here who knows something.'"

Mary Knutson said she and her husband will attend the 9 p.m. ceremony. Nargang said all who attend will be given white ribbons to tie on their car radio antennae or rear view mirrors as reminders that the person who murdered Rhonda Knutson is still to be found.

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**Shady Creek open**  
The Recreation Department in Muscatine, Ia. — Shady Creek Recreation Area reopened Sept. 1 after having been closed because of flooding. The recreation area is located off Iowa Highway 22, 10 miles east of Muscatine.

**Grand opening**  
The Recreation Department in Sioux City, Ia. — A grand opening ceremony and community reception for Western Iowa Tech Community College's Business campus will be from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Sept. 13.