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Austin American-Statesman

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1999



Yogurt Shop Killings

'On Dec. 6, 1991, as a city lost our innocence. Today, we regain our confidence.'

Austin Mayor Kirk Watson

8 years after slayings, police arrest 4 suspects

For families, excruciating memories reawakened

By Janet Wilson
American-Statesman Staff

It's happening all over again. It was bad enough eight years ago for the families of Jennifer and Sarah and Amy and Eliza when they were told their loving and popular girls had been killed savagely in the back room of a North Austin yogurt shop.

With the arrest Wednesday of four suspects, the families can put these on their demons. But they are horrifyingly familiar — faces that stare, not out of police mug shots, but from high school yearbooks.

And now, the inevitable series of trials to come brings the prospect of reawakening painful memories of reliving their daughters' deaths over and over again.

"This is like a burning ember that never goes out," said attorney Jeff Busk, who represented the families in a civil lawsuit against the shopping center and yogurt franchises where the slayings occurred. "You have a sense of relief that justice may finally be served, but it's going to be difficult to listen to that and go through it again and suffer again."

Because they had made no arrests, police kept some details about the killings private even from victims' families. The information, used in the ongoing investigation, at times helped weed out false confessions.

Victims' families were given advance notice when police thought they had a break in the case. But the families were not talking publicly about the arrest Wednesday of four suspects.

They've been here before — their hopes raised when it appeared police were making progress, only to have them dashed when the leads did not pan out.

"We simply do not have enough information and haven't gotten our emotions together enough to make a comment at this point,"

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In Charleston, W.Va., detectives Mark Abbott, left, and Eric Hoopes handcuff yogurt shop slaying suspect Robert Burns Springsteen Jr. at magistrate court Wednesday. Austin police say Springsteen and Michael James Scott have confessed.



In Travis County, three suspects were arrested and arraigned on capital murder charges Wednesday in the 1991 yogurt shop slayings of four Austin girls. From left, the suspects are Maurice Earl Pence of Lewisville, Michael James Scott of Duda and Forrest Brooks Webborn of Lockhart. Pence and Webborn were juveniles at the time of the killings.

Police say 2 confessed to killings at yogurt shop

By LAYAN COPELIN AND LEAH QUIN
American-Statesman Staff

Eight days after four teen-age girls were killed in a 1991 yogurt shop robbery, Austin police arrested a teen-ager with a revolver at Northcross Mall. He told investigators he had loaned the .22-caliber revolver to a friend who had used it in the yogurt shop slayings.

Almost eight years later, Austin police on Wednesday arrested and charged four men with capital murder, including the two teen-agers they had questioned long ago and dismissed as lying about the city's most notorious unsolved killing.

Three of the accused were McCallum High School students, and the fourth, who had attended several Austin schools, was not enrolled in Austin public schools at the time of the killings. All are high school dropouts. They've worked a variety of jobs, mostly as mechanics or maintenance workers or, in one case, as manager of a McDonald's restaurant.

At a misdemeanor news conference, Police Chief Stan Kane gave a spare outline of the arrests, and police would say nothing else. But a sworn police statement for the arrest warrant tells how police believe four teen-agers — 15 to 17 years old in 1991 — plotted to rob the I Can't Believe It's Yogurt store on West Anderson Lane and then shoot the four girls before setting the shop on fire.

That crime, on Dec. 6, 1991, stunned the community. Wednesday's announcement of arrests was almost as stunning, coming so long after the crime and raising the specter of teen-agers murdering teen-agers.

"There has probably been no other single

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Disregarding Clinton, House passes health insurance bill

By ROBERT PEARCE
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — The House of Representatives passed a bill Wednesday creating tax breaks to help millions of people buy health insurance. But it also took a procedural step that may jeopardize legislation to define patients' rights and regulate health maintenance organizations.

President Clinton and House Democrats cried foul. The White House said Clinton would veto the bill authorizing new tax breaks for the purchase of health insurance if the measure reached his desk in the form approved by the House on Wednesday night.

The contentious debate was the warm-up act to the main show that will play out today, when the

House considers rival bills that would, to varying degrees, guarantee new rights to patients in health maintenance organizations and other forms of managed care. The score of the disagreement hinges on how much of a right patients should have to sue their health plans for malpractice if they believe they suffered medical harm because they couldn't get the care they wanted.

For months, Clinton and House Democrats have demanded a House debate on legislation to set stringent, enforceable federal standards for HMOs and insurance companies. They get their wish Wednesday. The debate began.

But House Republicans insisted

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Movies, movies

The Austin Film Festival brings 70 panels, 90 films and several Hollywood dignitaries, XL cont.

Film fest flick: 'Get Bruce'

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SBC deal approved

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Houston beats out L.A. for new football team

By JOHN MAUER
American-Statesman Staff

Austin's got a new football team. Harris County Judge Robert Eckels said only half in jest. "We're a nice weekend trip. We'd love people to come see our new team and stadium."

Eckels, the de facto landlord of the Astro-dome complex, was in a good mood Tuesday with the announcement that the NFL would be coming back to town.

Houston was awarded something it used to take for granted, a National Football League franchise, after businessman Bob McNair offered to pony up a whopping \$100 million for an expansion team. It will begin playing in a new \$100-million, 70,000-seat, retractable-roof stadium next to the Astrodome in 2002. The billion-dollar deal is the largest in NFL

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The facts

■ **The team:** Houston will be the NFL's 32nd team. It will play in the AFC, on the Oilers' old stadium.

■ **Nickname:** Anything but Oilers. Unlike the expansion Cleveland Browns, which kept its name and heritage, the Houston NFL team will get a fresh start.

■ **Stadium:** A \$120-million stadium is planned. Bob McNair, owner, is planning. Sports, C1