

## **Link To Rapist Still Sought**

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By Miles Shuper

Visalia police investigators said today they still are attempting to determine if a link exists between the Sacramento rapist and the Visalia ransacker.

Sgt. John Vaughan said "right now we are still looking at evidence to determine if, indeed, there is a link between the Sacramento cases and ours."

Two officers went to Sacramento Wednesday to try to develop evidence linking the series of rapes to the man officers have nicknamed the Visalia ransacker whom they also believe may be responsible for the Sept. 11, 1975 slaying of Claude Snelling.

A number of similarities in physical description and actions of the man being sought for raping 23 Sacramento women and the Visalia ransacker have been reported.

Sgt. Vaughan, Lt. Roy Springmeyer and investigators Bill McGowen and Duane Shipley conferred all morning about the cases. McGowen, who was shot at in December, 1975 by a man believed to be the ransacker, and Shipley returned from Sacramento last night.

Sgt. Vaughan said he could not tell how long it would be before a determination can be made if the Sacramento and Visalia cases are linked.

Since October 1975, at least 23 women have been attacked by a young white male known as "the east area rapist" because he strikes repeatedly in the same middle and upper-middle-income neighborhoods east of the state Capitol.

"There are people who have reported they are sleeping in shifts and that sort of thing," says Bill Miller, press spokesman for the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department.

"Tuesday night we had 2,500 more calls through the switchboard than we normally have. Over 2,000 were calling with information they thought would help catch the rapist. And there were more calls about prowlers and suspicious persons," Miller said.

The increasing violent behavior of the Sacramento rapist matches the psychological profile compiled during the investigation of the Visalia ransacker case and the murder of Snelling, a College of the Sequoias journalism instructor.

While sheriff's deputies say there may have been some "copycat" rapes, they think they can tie the 23 rapes to one man between 19 and 30 with dark blond or brown hair.

The rapist hasn't killed or wounded anyone, authorities say, but he wields a knife and gun and promised his 23rd victim Tuesday he would kill two people if he saw stories about the attack.

In his earlier attacks, the rapist only broke into homes where there was no man. But he is growing bolder. Now he also strikes in homes where husbands lie asleep next to their wives and wakes up to find the rapist pointing a gun at them.

He usually wears gloves and some sort of hood or mask with small slits for his eyes and mouth. Typically, he rummages around a house and robs before he leaves his victims behind - tied up.

It is a style that strikes terror in the hearts of the residents in the area, lined with modern spacious homes.

The sheriff's department won't say how many people it has working on the case.

"We're doing the maximum," says Miller. But he admits the department is no closer to knowing who the rapist is than it was months ago.

"This area is densely populated. It's impossible to cover an area like that without putting a man on every block. We'd have to call out the National Guard," Miller said.

The department also revealed earlier this week it had consulted psychologists who say the rapist probably has small sexual genitals, a domineering mother and a weak or absent father.