

## **Rapes Spur Change in Celebrated Irvine Life Style**

By Doug Brown

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Lazily sunning herself Saturday alongside an Irvine community pool, Chris Sbuttoni seemed a picture of carefree leisure. The appearance, however, deceived, for even though the pool was surrounded by a locked fence, the 28-year-old public accountant kept within reach an aerosol tear gas canister, tastefully encased in leather.

More, she let it be known that a second vial of tear gas was hidden in the bedroom nightstand of her nearby condominium.

"It used to be," she said, "I didn't worry because of the nature and caliber of the people living here, but now, I don't know. . . ."

On Saturday, Irvine was still reeling from five sexual attacks that occurred midweek in the span of 48 hours, and Sbuttoni, who once thought she would never again have to carry tear gas for protection after moving nearly two years ago from Costa Mesa to the Woodbridge community in Irvine, had rearmed herself.

### **No New Leads in Cases**

"I have it with me all the time," said the single woman, who added that she has moved in with friends until the crimes are solved.

There were no further developments in the cases Saturday, an Irvine police spokesman said. No new attacks were reported.

Sbuttoni was not alone in her fear. Residents of Woodbridge, where most of the two rapes and three assaults occurred, said in interviews Saturday that the lesson learned by the tranquility-smashing outbreak is that even the most planned communities—and Irvine has earned a national reputation as an ultra-planned city—no longer are immune from serious crime.

Already the residents have altered their life styles in subtle ways. Since the assaults have taken place during the day, some mothers who normally stayed home during the day with their young children now spend the time with friends or relatives.

Other women, who until recently spent long hours at the pool, jogging or taking advantage of Irvine's other outdoor enticements, said they now spend the day locked into their homes until their husbands return from work.

"I was afraid to even go out to the garage to do the laundry this week, said one Woodridge woman. Doors previously left unlocked are now bolted, and women who until last week answered a knock on the door without hesitation refuse to do so.

Others, who said they once considered it their civic duty as Irvine residents to give directions to lost drivers, said they now turn a deaf ear and quickly walk to their houses or those of friends when an unknown car pulls curbside.

And far fewer people appeared in public places Saturday, several of the Woodbridge residents said. Some interviewed Saturday said they had not learned of the sexual assault until Friday, when they read Irvine Police Department bulletins left at their homes. Several acknowledged that their ignorance about the risks they faced ironically was because of the isolation from the outside world that Irvine residents revel in.

"Woodbridge is supposed to be a haven," said Marilyn Kanack, a single, 27-year-old airlines sales representative who moved to Woodbridge from Tustin nearly three years ago. "Irvine is so pure and sterile—unlike Santa Ana or some other downtown area," Kanack said.

"It's as if someone gave this town a sterility shot that would make it pleasant and everybody would be happy living here," Kanack said. "It always seemed safe here. But I guess we felt so safe that we got to be too trusting. Now outsiders are taking advantage of the situation."

Often, neighbors only know each other in passing, which adds to their isolation, Kanack said. "When I'm home during the weekday, it's pretty deserted, so it's pretty easy for someone to watch our comings and goings," she said.

Echoing a common belief, Sbuttoni speculated: "It's probably outsiders who are doing this. There's a lot of construction going on here, a lot of farm field hands nearby and a lot of door-to-door salesmen."

(Police have not pinpointed any suspects and thus cannot say whether the culprits are "outsiders" or themselves residents of Irvine.)

Sitting on the sands of the North Lake Beach and Tennis Club along with her husband and an infant, an Irvine woman, who declined to give her name, said she at first didn't believe the reports.

Indeed, only a total of 28 rapes were reported in 1981 and 1982, and police officials said that prior to the attacks last week there had been no rapes in Woodbridge in two years.

"We're isolated from each other during the day," the mother of three went on, "especially since school started again" and children no longer filled the streets. "The rapes started the week school started again."

Donna and Bob Walsh, who had just finished riding his bicycle, were talking to a neighbor walking his dog at the corner of Silkleaf and Blue Lake.

"I've become completely paranoid," said Donna Walsh, who operates a sales business from her Woodbridge home. "I'm at home by myself during the day," Walsh said, "and I always open the door when I hear a knock, without thinking. I would never do that now."

Bob Walsh, who commutes to Los Angeles daily to his marketing job, said he is very concerned about his wife's safety and that of his 5-year-old son.

"I'm not happy about the situation at all," he said.

"And this area is susceptible to this kind of thing," he added, looking down the street to nearly deserted Daybreak Park. "A lot of us have been lulled into thinking

this is the perfect community where you can have your wife and kids in safety without taking some common-sense precautions. It's not."

CAPTIONS:

Chris Sbuttoni shows friend how to use tear gas device. Sbuttoni says she now carries it with her constantly.

Bob and Donna Walsh discuss precautions they're taking in the wake of five recent attacks on Irvine women.

Two boaters make their way under a bridge in the heart of Irvine's Woodbridge community, where recent rapes have disturbed the usual tranquility.