

Rapist Linked to O.C. Killings
Crime 23-year-old DNA Evidence from Three Bay Area Assaults Could Help Solve Six Homicides Investigated by Local Authorities.

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An Orange County serial killer dubbed the "Original Nightstalker" has been linked by DNA evidence to the notorious "East Area rapist" who sexually assaulted 40 Northern California women in the late 1970s, officials said. The breakthrough occurred when 23-year-old DNA evidence from three Contra Costa County rapes was compared with DNA from six homicide cases being investigated by the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

The identity of the suspect remains unknown, but officials say the added details may help solve the slayings. "I'm not a bit surprised," retired Sacramento County sheriff's Lt. Richard Shelby said of evidence that the serial rapist he tracked had graduated to homicides. "This is incredible," said David Witthuhn, whose wife was raped and killed in Irvine. "It opens up new leads and gives the detectives more stuff to work with." The East Area rapist began the attacks in a neighborhood east of the state Capitol and later raped women in Davis, Stockton, Concord, Danville and San Ramon.

Lock and gun sales soared, porch lights were left burning, and burglaries fell 80 percent as a result of residents being on alert, officials said. Nearly all the assaults involved couples who were awakened and tied up before the woman was raped. The rapist stacked dishes on the men, and couples were warned they would be killed if the dishes broke. Shortly after the rapes ended, a series of assaults and slayings occurred from 1979 to 1986 in Goleta, Ventura, Irvine and Laguna Niguel. The methods were similar, except that 10 of the assaults ended in homicides -- six of them linked by DNA evidence.

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