

Serial Killer has Area Link

By the Associated Press

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SANTA ANA (AP) -- A serial killer who stalks and rapes his victims might have committed 10 murders in four Southern California coastal communities including Ventura between 1979 and 1986 according to detectives in an unsolved homicides unit. Newly found DNA evidence from rape kits in some of the archived cases linked six unsolved murders Orange County Sheriff's Department investigators said.

Detectives then analyzed the killer's habits during the killings and linked him to four more slayings.

The killer prowled neighborhoods of Ventura Irvine Laguna Niguel and Goleta according to investigators. They said the suspect might have watched some couples have sex then broke in and raped the woman and killed her and the man.

The Ventura victims linked to the killer are Lyman R. Smith 43 and his wife Charlene 33. They were found dead in the bedroom of their house in March 1980. They had been beaten to death March 13 with a fireplace log and tied in their bed after they died police believed at the time.

The killer sometimes shot his victims. Other times he bound them with rope covered them with bedding and bludgeoned them to death possibly to keep the splatter of blood off his clothes investigators said.

The killer might also have brought a German shepherd dog along to the crimes. Paw prints from such a dog were found at a 1979 double-slaying in Goleta. In 1981 neighbors saw a man and the dog running away from the Irvine home of a bludgeoning victim.

Detectives said the killer might have used the animal to appear less suspicious as he stalked his prey making possible witnesses think he was simply a man walking his dog.

Now sheriff's investigators with the unsolved homicides team hope to learn the killer's identity and bring him to justice.

The last known killing was in Irvine in May 1986. The victim was Janelle Cruz an 18-year-old who was raped and bludgeoned in her home minutes after her boyfriend left.

The downtime since that killing leads detectives to believe the killer is either dead or in prison for some other crime. "But who knows?" sheriff's Investigator Larry Pool said in Sunday's edition of *The Orange County Register*. "He could be getting out tomorrow next week or next year."

Researchers have compiled a list of more than 7000 potential suspects sifted through aging reports and re-interviewed witnesses in an attempt to solve the crimes.

So far they have no idea who he could be.

"This guy spent hours prowling stalking roaming neighborhoods and picking out his victims" sheriff's Investigator Brian Heaney said. "We want to make sure he's never out there again."