

Serial killings become focus for campus safety

(CPS) - The 34th Street graffiti wall is an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colors and words — permanence is unheard of. At least, it was.

Two weeks after a killer murdered five college students, an anonymous artist painted the victims' names on a section of the wall — white letters on black. A red heart was drawn underneath. "We love you" and "We miss you," spray-painted in yellow, has been the only addition to the memorial since then.

The tribute to Sonja Larson, 18; Christina Powell, 17; Christa Hoyt, 18; Tracey Inez Paules, 23; and Manuel Taboada, 23, remains today. Four were University of Florida students. One attended Santa Fe Community College.

On Aug. 26, 1990, police in Gainesville found the first body in a string of mutilation murders that stunned the nation. The University of Florida and the Gainesville community are prepared to remember the victims and to promote increased campus safety at home and across the nation.

The parents aren't the only ones worrying. Last year students flocked to stores to buy locks, guns and mace. Fear was so widespread that thousands of students went home for a week. Some didn't return.

Many still suffer anxiety caused by the murders.

JoAnne Kaul is a senior who lived with her boyfriend in an apartment near where the first two bodies were found last year.

"At first we got really scared. We freaked," she said.

Now, Kaul said she has three locks on her apartment's front door and three locks on her bedroom door. She adds, "I will never live in a bottom floor apartment."

Kelly Burlingame, a junior transfer student, is moving into the Williamsburg Apartments where Powell and Larson were killed.

"I'm starting to be more cautious now," said Burlingame, who will live with her sister and her sister's boyfriend. "I'm just going to try to make sure that my doors are always locked and that I'm not alone."

People living in the off-campus apartment complexes where students were murdered aren't the only ones taking greater security measures.

"Last year we were really scared," said Jon Barash, a member of Pi

Lambda Phi fraternity. "We had 10 people staying in our apartment and one of the guys parked his Harley Davidson (motorcycle) in front of our apartment door. We thought people might think a biker lived there or something and would leave us alone."

Tensions eased after the arrests of the two suspects in the slayings.

Then, two female University of Florida students were found strangled to death in their off-campus apartment in June. A carpet cleaner has been charged in connection with their deaths.

"It's a complete . . . 'Boom!' feeling," said Lt. Sadie Darnell, Gainesville police spokeswoman.

"There are no guarantees that we're not going to have more student victims, but we can make a concerted effort. There will be some people who will say, 'That happened in Gainesville, Florida. It won't happen here.' That's ignorant," she said. "All you can do is try to learn from it."

Safety tips recommended by Gainesville's Think Smart Program:

PERSONAL:

- Maintain safe walking distances from bushes, parked cars, alleys, etc.
- Look for suspicious people when leaving a mall, bar, building, etc.
- Recognize that alcohol can cloud judgment.
- Have a plan of action in case of a threatening situation.
- Utilize campus escort and other safety services.

CAR/HOME

- Always have keys in hand as you approach your car or apartment.
- Park/reside in well-lighted areas.
- Lock car and apartment doors at all times.
- Make sure sliding glass doors have a secondary lock.

• Remember that chain locks are not considered security devices.

• Request solid-core exterior doors in apartments.

• Ask for locks to be changed or re-keyed when moving in.

• Use only your first initial in phone book and on mailbox.

• Practice the Buddy System — alert friends of your whereabouts.



A bicyclist whizzes by a graffiti-covered wall that stands in tribute to five murdered students



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