

Teen sleuths scour 'crime scenes' at forensic science camp

Henry Lee offers advice: Be observant, objective, scientific

By Abram Katz

Register Science Editor

There was more than enough mayhem to go around Friday at the University of New Haven, with dead bodies facedown in a stairwell, crammed into a refrigerator, supine on a bed, and sitting in a chair with a bullet in the head.

Evidence was all over the place: blood spatters, liquor bottles, shell casings, bones in an oven, fingerprints, spilled pills and strange white powder.

The place was crawling with teenage girls and boys equipped with gloves, scissors, string, crime scene tape, cameras, tape measures, bottles of chemicals, envelopes, rulers and yellow evidence markers.

After all, this was the last day of the Crime Scene Investigation Camp at the Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences. High school students who were taught tool marks, blood

analysis, fingerprinting, crime scene photography and other aspects of forensic science during the week were putting their knowledge to a practical test.

Lee, founder and professor of the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science at UNH, and famed sleuth, had some parting words before setting four teams loose on three separate rooms and a stairwell.

The most important elements, he said, are the unbiased collection of facts, creation of a hypothesis and a scientific test.

"Why do we have to observe?"

Lee asked the group.

"To see the crime scene," a boy answered. Lee beamed and gave him a gold-plated "Dr. Henry Lee CSI" badge.

A good crime scene investigator searches out the tiniest bits of evidence and does not jump to conclusions, Lee

See *CSI*, A5

said. "You need to be objective."

What effect would refrigeration have on a dead body? Delayed decomposition, a camper offered. Indeed, Lee said, smiling broadly. The blood splatter behind

the sitting body must have been traveling at 100 feet per second, he said. "Only a couple of things could have caused that. A gunshot or an explosion."

Lee said he and his staff had set up fairly difficult crime scenes for students to scour, complete with dummy victims.

Peter Massey, training coordinator at the Institute of Forensic Science, and Daniel Maxwell, instructor of criminal justice at the College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, acted as judges, medical examiners, and other officials with whom investigators deal. "There is key evidence in each room," Massey said. "The right way is the right way."

One group of students gathered several pieces of evidence before they asked Massey for a search warrant. In the real world, all of that evidence, no matter how crucial, would be tossed out of court, he said.

Saladin Hasan, 17, who will enter 12th grade at the Hyde Leadership School in Hamden, was making a detailed sketch of the room with the refrigerated person. "You need to sketch every detail. I can imagine doing this for real some day," he said.

"I don't know if the bones in the oven are from the body in the refrigerator," noted Kelsey Higgins, 15, a junior at Sacred Heart Academy in Hamden.

"I'm sure there's a big clue in there somewhere that will explain everything. I'm thinking a guy killed his wife and child. It's kind of creepy. Thankfully there's no smell," she said.

Actually, her room was a Jeffrey Dahmer-type crime. Dahmer murdered 17 people and cannibalized parts of some. Thus, the bones in the stove.

Judy Chen, 16, on vacation from Taiwan and staying with local relatives, correctly identified the dead woman on the bed as a suicide.

"I'd be really nervous when I look at a real dead body. This was really fun." Chen said she wants to be either a CSI or a doctor.

The dead guy in a room with two kinds of shell casings, and drugs on the table, was in a drug-deal gone bad, Massey said. In the stairwell was an inebriated woman who was sexually assaulted before falling down the stairs (or was she pushed?)





Liana Conklin of Westbrook stands above a fake corpse at a mock crime scene during the University of New Haven's Crime Scene Investigation Camp, part of the university's Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, Friday in West Haven.

Thomas Cain/
For the Register