

Trial to begin in '77 case

Jeffrey Glazebrook is accused of murder in the death of Sadie May McReynolds.

BY JOE DUGGAN
Lincoln Journal Star

The murder of Sadie May McReynolds has remained unsolved for nearly 32 years.

Starting Monday, prosecutors will do their best to close the case.

In Saunders County District Court in Wahoo, they will try to convince a jury that a 17-year-old boy sexually assaulted the retired schoolteacher at her Ashland home in 1977.

McReynolds, 97, died two weeks later from health complications triggered by the assault.

Jeffrey Glazebrook, now 49 and in prison for another crime, stands accused of first-degree murder in her death.

It's one of the oldest cold case homicides ever to go to trial in Nebraska. While no agency keeps a registry of such prosecutions, county attorneys, defense lawyers and police detectives interviewed by the Journal Star could think of no older case.

"It shows law enforcement is always looking,"

See **COLD CASE**, Page A2

said Peter Massey, training coordinator at the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science at the University of New Haven in Connecticut.

"(Cold) cases don't go away."

Prosecutors filed charges against Glazebrook last year following a grand jury indictment.

At the heart of the McReynolds case are the re-

sults of DNA testing on hair recovered from the crime scene. The prosecution team of Saunders County Attorney Scott Tingelhoff and Assistant Attorney General Doug Warner will contend the DNA tests link the hair to Glazebrook.

But that hardly means he is as good as convicted.

The defense team — Saunders County Public Defender Thomas Klein and Jerry Soucie with the Nebraska Commission on Public Advocacy — has indicated it will challenge the DNA findings.

It's not the only challenge prosecutors will face.

The burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt always falls on the state in criminal trials. It will fall a little harder on a case more than three decades old.

"Trials generally get tougher for the prosecution as time goes on," said Joe Kelly, Chief Deputy Lancaster County Attorney.

Kelly knows because in 2006 he helped prosecute Todd Baker for the 1996 murder of Anne True, 38, of Lincoln. After his conviction, Baker admitted to the 1995 killing of 15-year-old Missy Schmidt.

Just finding witnesses after so much time has passed is a major challenge, Kelly said. Another is finding out whether witnesses remember the facts the same as they told them to police years before.

The condition of physical evidence often is an even greater point of contention in cold cases, he added. And the prosecution must show proper chain-of-command was followed in preserving the evidence.

In the McReynolds case, authorities couldn't test the evidence for DNA when the

crime occurred after midnight on Nov. 6, 1977. They also were hampered by the fact that she could not identify her attacker.

She did tell investigators an intruder

forced his way into her house after she answered her doorbell. He knocked off her glasses and sexually assaulted her. She could give only a rough physical description.

Over the next two weeks, she suffered a bladder infection from the attack, then heart failure and, finally, pneumonia.

Investigators strongly suspected Glazebrook, who lived across the street from the victim and sometimes did chores for her. But they never had enough evidence to charge him.

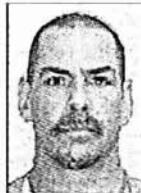
Lt. Bob Frank, cold case investigator with the Nebraska State Patrol, renewed the investigation in 1999 by pursuing DNA testing on the hair. But there wasn't urgency to act, in part, because Glazebrook was serving a prison sentence until 2010. He was convicted in 1991 of sexual assault and sentenced to 16½ to 38 years in prison.

So the McReynolds case stood still for nearly another decade until last year, when a Saunders County grand jury heard evidence and indicted Glazebrook.

While prosecuting someone for a 30-year-old murder is rare, it may become less rare as DNA technology continues to improve, said Detective Jim Shields, who formerly investigated missing persons cold cases for the Omaha



McREYNOLDS



GLAZEBROOK



Police Department.

"The technology that's out there now didn't even exist just five years ago," he said. "It's amazing."

Even though May McReynolds was nearly a century old when she died in 1977, there are still people who knew and loved her.

She had no biological children but was beloved by the children of the man she

married. Their children, in turn, simply knew her as "Grandma May."

Some of those grandchildren are gone now. Some are in their 80s.

For them, the trial that starts Monday will be more than just a cold case.

They hope it will be an answer.

Reach Joe Duggan at 473-7239 or jduggan@journalstar.com.