


# *High-Tech Crime Fighters*

From the moment you walk into the three-story, zinc-wrapped building situated prominently on the north end of Maxcy Quad, you know you are there to be educated and stimulated. The edgy architecture itself, after all, offers a clue.

According to Sasaki Associates, who designed the facility, it "aims to evoke curiosity and call to mind the voyeuristic fascination that our society has with crime and crime scene investigation."





Laser technology reconstructs a bullet's trajectory.

*"The impact of this terrific building will be felt around the world."*

## Welcome to the new home of the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science.

The Institute dates back 20 years, and has been housed on the fourth floor of Dodds Hall. Its full lineage traces its roots to Dr. Henry Lee's arrival at the University of New Haven in 1975. At the time, forensic science was hardly glamorous and certainly not what is portrayed on today's popular "CSI" television shows. The University's original forensics lab was located in a storage closet.

That closet has blossomed into an \$11.5 million, ultra-modern facility that, according to Institute Executive Director and forensic science professor Timothy Palmbach, '82 B.S., '86 M.S., has no equal in American higher education. "I'm not aware of anything that comes close to this," Palmbach says.

It's no wonder, then, that hundreds of people came to campus last October to see this new architectural marvel up close during a ribbon-cutting dedication complete with a bagpipe procession, hordes of media, and an A-list group of speakers and friends of Dr. Lee's.

One of them, Dr. Michael Baden, a forensic pathologist and host of HBO's "Autopsy," offered this perspective: "The impact of this terrific building will be felt around the world."

Indeed, the facility's technology promises to assist law enforcement officials across the globe, as well as those right here in Connecticut. Take, for example, the Biermacher Forensic Crisis Management Command Center, which enables crime scene investigators anywhere in the world to share time-sensitive forensic data via satellite with UNH experts, who in turn can provide immediate analysis. "The sooner we can get results," says Palmbach, "the higher the probability of a crime being solved."

Public service remains a high priority for the Institute, especially the continuing education of practitioners across the broad spectrum of the legal community. Working in tandem with police departments, faculty and staff at the Institute are revisiting some 300 "cold" cases. Lee tells the story of one woman whose daughter went missing 35 years ago. "She fell to her knees, weeping," Lee says. "She told me we were her last hope. By solving these cases, we can restore the public's confidence in the criminal justice system."

Also among the Institute's chief tasks is the education of current UNH students. In cooperation with the University's Forensic Science department, the Institute offers undergraduate and graduate students opportunities for hands-on learning. During the Crime Scene Investigation course, students become immersed in a multimedia crime scene brimming with clues and are required to evaluate their surroundings. "We learn to interpret a scene properly and to recognize patterns of evidence," says Cassie Boldt, a graduate student from Illinois pursuing her master's degree in forensic science. "The technology here is amazing and will definitely prepare us better for our future careers."

The third aspect of the Institute's mission is educating the public. That emphasis is readily apparent thanks to the Pompea Family Learning Center, which greets visitors immediately upon arrival.

Adorning one wall of the entrance lobby is a caricature portraying Dr. Lee conferring with fictional crime fighters Batman, Lieutenant Columbo, Sherlock Holmes and Dick Tracy. On another wall a mural-sized video screen asks you for your palm print. After warning that your prints are being checked by an automated fingerprint identification system, Dr. Lee introduces you to the world of forensic science. (Following the presentation, Dr. Lee confirms your innocence.)

The Learning Center also includes an interactive kiosk that enables you to relive famous forensic cases such as JonBenet





A mock crime scene presents evidence to be evaluated, collected and examined.

Ramsey, O.J. Simpson and Elizabeth Smart. Using touch-screen technology, you can flip through crime-scene photos and legal documents. A Crime Scene Reconstruction Virtual Room puts you in the moment—as sirens wail and voices crackle over police scanners, you see images of the famous Connecticut “wood chipper” case superimposed on the walls.

Walk past the interactive displays on ballistics, forensic anthropology (apt for fans of “Bones”) and fingerprints, and visit the Crime Scene Theater to view vignettes on thorny cases Lee solved, many of them with his former student Palmbach. A bloody bat. A peculiar brick recovered from the bottom of a pond. Telltale signs of a domestic struggle. Blood spatters found inside an impounded van. Bits of physical evidence, suggests Lee, that piece together stories, belie what defendants claim and help solve mysteries. All completely fascinating in that voyeuristic fashion the building was designed to reflect.

“Henry tends to take a very complex, very scientific field and make it accessible, enjoyable and something people genuinely strive to understand,” says UNH President Steven Kaplan. “This building, on some level, is a forensic science learning center designed to interest young people in chemistry, biology and physics and to show them how science is used to solve crimes.”

The Institute’s myriad exhibits celebrate forensic science’s history and announce its future. Quaint artifacts show how evidence was collected and preserved a generation ago. What was once cutting edge now appears primitive next to the facility’s high-tech gizmos such as ground-penetrating radar and a high-intensity laser for tracing a bullet’s trajectory. Advanced technology extends to the two “Smart” classrooms, a research lab and the Bergami Family Lecture Hall, which, from its third-floor perch, offers a panoramic view of the newly

renovated Maxcy Quad and glimpses of Long Island Sound.

“Thanks to these technologies and advanced techniques, the Institute will establish the University of New Haven as an undisputed leader in educating and training forensic scientists and other law enforcement officials” says Ken Biermacher, ’76 B.S., a member of the University’s Board of Governors and chair of the Institute’s Board of Directors.

That sentiment underscores the Institute’s seriousness of purpose. Despite the often tantalizing nature of its exhibits, the Institute exists ultimately to help solve crimes and render justice.

“The Institute will become a catalyst enabling professionals in the field to work together,” says Lee. “The world then becomes a small community engaged in fighting crime.”

**Ribbon cutters included (from left to right) U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro; UNH Board of Governors Chair Samuel Bergami Jr.; Connecticut Lieutenant Governor Michael Fedele; UNH President Steven Kaplan; Dr. Henry Lee; Ambassador Peng Keyu of the People’s Republic of China; UNH Board of Governors member Ken Biermacher.**

