

Linnea Dick Crime Scene



Investigators carry out the body of Linnea Dick from her home in Fort Collins. May 30, 2008.

Police hunt for clues in killing of 20-year-old

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FORT COLLINS — The neighbors who keep their lawns cut and flowers blooming on Yale Avenue are tired of talking about Friday, when their peaceful neighborhood became a murder scene.

They keep discussing it, though, because no one yet understands exactly what happened, much less why.

What they know is that the split-level wood-and-brick ranch house at 124 Yale Ave. caught fire around 11:30 a.m. Friday.

A next-door neighbor tried to run into the house, was turned away by the smoke, then called 911.

About 10 minutes after the fire trucks arrived, the crew brought out the body of Linnea Dick, a 20-year-old who lived there with her boyfriend.

"When they brought her body out, it was very surreal," said Ruth Champion, who lives across the street. "We all just ran for our houses as fast as possible."

Within a couple hours, police had declared the woman's death a homicide.

They said Dick was sexually assaulted and strangled in her bedroom on the second story of the house.

The suspect or suspects used some sort of "accelerant" to light a fire in the basement and the upstairs bedroom to hide evidence of the murder, Fort Collins Police spokeswoman Rita Davis said.

Then they apparently stole Dick's car and drove away.

Dick's boyfriend was at work when she was killed, Davis added. He had an alibi and was cooperating fully with police.

A nationwide alert to law enforcement regarding Dick's missing car has been issued, police said.

Fort Collins police and Poudre Fire Authority investigators were in and out of the house Sunday, trying to reconstruct the crime with an agent of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

A few clearly shaken family members laid flowers at the base of a tree on the corner of the property. They said they were not yet ready to speak publicly.

Neighbors gathered Sunday night to reconnect and talk things over.

"There's a lot of single women on this street, and they're pretty freaked out," Champlon said. "It's been a very quiet and a very nice neighborhood. I feel really sorry for her parents."

Dick was a part-time student at Front Range Community College. Her parents owned the house.

Most of the neighbors didn't know her very well.

"Basically, what we're trying to understand is who she was, what her life was like beforehand, who her family was and what happened in the couple of days leading up to her death," Davis said.

The killing is the second of a young woman in Fort Collins in a week.

Valerie A. Gendemalik, 25, was found shot to death May 25 in an apartment in the 1600 block of Westbridge Drive. Her boyfriend, Justin Levi Moore, 29, was arrested on suspicion of murder, the Fort Collins Coloradoan reported.