

Cops turn to Albion man for help with cold case

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

Larry Cutter has a keen eye for cars.

One look at his 1973 Mustang Mach I convertible, lovingly restored and done up in dazzling yellow gold paint with black racing stripes, tells you that. Then there's his shop, where Cutter learned the art of auto body repair from his father Sherm. The walls are full of new old stock parts neatly arranged and labeled, bumpers, quarter panels, and dashboards crowd the spotless floor, and old cars wearing new paint stand on blocks, minus hoods and doors.

Cutter, a 1975 graduate of Edgerton High School, grew up a Ford guy in a GM town, fending off challenges from Chevilles and Camaros in his 1971 black and silver Boss Mustang 351. Cutter claims he never lost a race in that car, which he's in the process of restoring.

Detectives from the Dane County Sheriff's office recently presented Cutter with a challenge of a different kind: use his encyclopedic knowledge of car and truck bodies to help identify a pickup truck that witnesses link to the unsolved murder of an Edgerton woman 31 year ago.

On Aug. 5 1982, Barbara Nelson, age 34, disappeared from a convenience store and gas station where she worked in Albion township. The store was located where Albion Road meets U.S. Highway 51, across the highway from the Edgerton Oasis. Albion Fireworks currently owns the building.

A customer walked into the store about 6:00 p.m., found it empty, and called the store's owners, who im-

mediately summoned the police. The police found Nelson's purse inside the store. Nelson's paycheck was still in her purse, but \$355 in paper money was missing from the cash register, along with a stack of credit card slips and some traveler's checks. Nelson's car was in the parking lot.

Two witnesses gave descriptions of two suspects and an older model blue or green pickup truck to a police sketch artist. Both witnesses described a faded square on the drivers' side door of the truck, where a sign might have once been attached.

One witness, a girl, stopped at the store to buy candy about the time the police think Nelson was abducted, sometime between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. The girl saw the truck parked outside the store, and saw a man outside of the truck, inside or near the store; she did not see a second man.

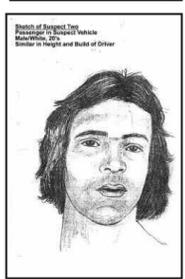
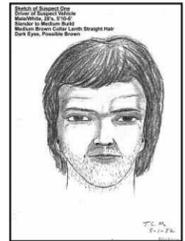
The second witness, a man, saw two men in the truck on a road near the mini-store about the same time; one of the men in the truck matched the description of the man the girl saw at the store. The second witness told the police the truck was driving erratically.

Cutter, whose shop is located one mile north of the mini-store, remembers the day after Nelson disappeared.

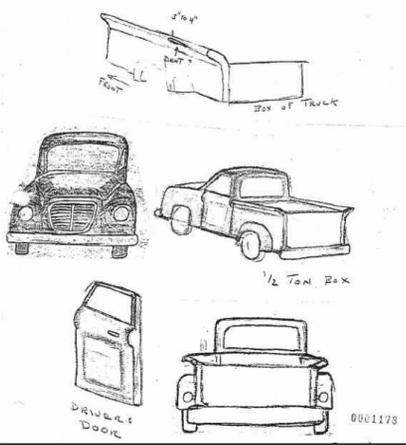
"I remember a helicopter coming down and traveling the length of the road here," said Cutter, pointing out the shop window toward Albion Road, which was U.S. Highway 51 until 1962, when I-90 went in a few hundred yards to the east. Cutter said he often stopped by the store to buy gas or a soda, but didn't know Nelson by name.

Agents from the FBI descended

on Edgerton the day after Nelson disappeared and assisted detectives from the Dane County and Rock County sheriff's offices with the investigation. They combed area fields, knocked on doors, and showed peo-



Suspect Vehicle Description: An older model (possibly 1960's or early 1970's) dark blue or dark green pickup truck. The truck box had a rail that flared up and out at a 45-degree angle. It also had protruding rear fenders. The driver's side door had a square or rectangle area that was rusted, bleached or had primer on it. A sign might have previously covered that area of the door. The headlights and taillights were round.



ple sketches of the suspects and their truck. Nelson's photo flashed across television screens that night on the ten o'clock news.

"They hit it pretty hard," said Dane County Sheriff's detective Coy Bethel, referring to the investigation in the hours and days following Nelson's disappearance. But the world was less connected 31 years ago. There was no internet or Amber Alert, and there were no cell phones. And for the most part, the only businesses that had surveillance cameras were banks.

On the afternoon of Aug. 10, a town of Lafayette employee who was cutting grass along Bray Road three miles east of Elkhorn discovered Nelson's body lying in a cornfield, 40 miles from where she was ab-

ducted. She had been badly beaten about the face, and shot once in the back and once in the arm. Several .25-caliber shell casings were found near her body.

After Nelson's body was found, a woman from the Elkhorn area told the police that on the day after Nelson was abducted, she saw a truck matching the description of the suspect's truck near where Nelson's body was found. The woman said she saw two men who looked like the suspects in or near the truck. She also said she noticed a disturbance in or

near the truck as she drove past, but didn't think twice about it until she heard about Nelson's body being found four days later.

Later, the police found a blouse in a field along Bass Creek Road near Afton, 15 miles directly south of Albion. Nelson's sister said the blouse looked like one that belonged to Nelson. The police also found a pair of women's shoes and some duct tape in a field approximately two miles northeast of where Nelson's body was found and two miles southeast of Alpine Valley Music Theater, where the Grateful Dead played on Aug. 7 and Aug. 8.

Days, then weeks, then months passed, with no arrests. Detectives compared the details of the case to similar cases in the state and region, even checking them against the patterns of known serial killers. From the beginning, said Bethel, tipsters called the police to identify persons who matched the suspects' descriptions and who had access to a truck like the one described by the witnesses. None of those tips led to an arrest.

The months grew into years. But the police never closed the case. Detectives periodically reissued the descriptions and sketches of the suspects and the truck, hoping to jog the memory of someone who saw something—anything—that might bring them one step closer to bringing Nelson's killer or killers to justice. They also wanted to help Nelson's family achieve a sense of closure.

Lynn Skau, one of the Reporter's proofreaders, knew Nelson well. Skau said Nelson used to work at the IGA grocery store in Edgerton, and

Call with tips

Anyone with information that might pertain to the abduction and murder of Barbara Nelson should call Detective Robert Craig at the Walworth County Sheriff's office at (262) 741-4425 or Crime Stoppers at (262) 723-2677, or e-mail walworthcotips@co.walworth.wi.us, or call Detective Coy Bethel with the Dane County Sheriff's office at (608) 283-3970 or the tips line at (608) 284-6900.

Callers do not have to call Crime Stoppers or the tips line to remain anonymous; the detectives will honor requests to remain anonymous, and have important questions they need to ask anyone with a tip in the case.

Additionally, the police are very interested in performing ballistics tests on any .25-caliber gun in the area that might be 31 years or older. Anyone in the Edgerton, Janesville, or Walworth County area who owns such a gun and acquired it after August of 1982, or who owns such a gun that went missing about August of 1982 and later turned up, should call the police at one of the above numbers or e-mail the Walworth County tips address.

would pack up groceries for delivery to Skau's mother, who lived out by Lake Koshkonong and didn't drive. "My mother loved her," Skau said of Nelson. "She was a very sweet person, a really kind person."

Bethel said tips have continued to trickle in. In the time he's been work-

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Thanksgiving will be extra special for Edgerton resident Everett Stanke this year, for it is also his 100th birthday. Above, Stanke accepts a commemorative World War II medal at Edgerton Rotary's Veterans Day ceremony on Tuesday, Nov. 12.

(Edgerton Reporter photo/Rachel Wittrock)

Towns appeal to AG on lake district records

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

A cold spell that sent overnight temperatures plunging into the 20s formed a thin layer of ice across ponds and creeks in the Edgerton area last week. Once winter hits, the lakes will be the next to freeze over: Mud Lake, Sweet Lake, Rice Lake, even Lake Koshkonong, which is two miles wide and five miles long but only seven feet deep.

A dispute between several town boards and the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District over access to the district's financial records, however, is headed for anything but a deep-freeze—it's heating up.

In May of last year, the Albion town board, joined by the Koshkonong and Milton town boards, sent a public records request to the district asking for detailed financial records from the last three years. The district refused to turn over any documents. Brian Christianson, chairman of the district's board of commissioners, said all of the financial records that state law requires lake districts to compile were available on the district's website.

Bryan Meyer, the Milton town

chairman, called on Christianson to release detailed financial information at the lake district's quarterly meeting on June 6. Five days later, Hank Stockwell presented the Fulton town board with a petition signed by 68 town residents calling on the lake district to conduct an in-depth audit of its financial records. On June 24, the lake district board held a special meeting and amended its proposed 2014 budget to include a \$40,000 line item for an in-depth audit.

At the lake district's annual meeting on Aug. 10, electors voted overwhelmingly to strip that item from the budget. They then approved a proposal to spend the money instead on legal costs related to the district's on-going fight with the state Department of Natural Resources over the department's order establishing the water level on Lake Koshkonong.

The lake district won a major victory in that fight, which has dragged on for eight years and cost half a million dollars, on July 16, when the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that the DNR impermissibly excluded evidence of economic impact when establishing the water level in 2005 and sent the case back to Rock County circuit court for further proceedings.

Some electors, each of whom pays a special charge on their property tax bills to fund the district's operation, think the lake district has spent too much money on the legal fight. And some electors, including duck hunters, farmers, and environmentalists, oppose a higher water level. Boaters and businesses around the lake support a higher level.

Now, the town of Albion's lawyer, Tim Fenner, has written a letter to Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen and the district attorneys of Rock, Dane, and Jefferson counties, the three counties in which Lake Koshkonong lies, requesting them to file a lawsuit asking a court to order the lake district to turn over its financial records.

Under the Wisconsin public records law, a government authority that receives a public records request must respond to a public records request "as soon as practicable without delay." If the authority denies access to the records, it must provide a "specific and sufficient" reason for the denial. If a requestor disagrees with an authority's decision to deny it access to the records, it may petition the district attorney or the Attorney General to sue the authority, or sue the

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Everett Stanke celebrates centennial

By Rachel Wittrock
Reporter staff

In little more than a week, Edgerton and Swifhaven Retirement Home resident Everett Stanke will celebrate a milestone granted few people: his 100th birthday.

Stanke was born on Nov. 28, 1913, one of seven children born to Matilda and Charlie Stanke.

Stanke graduated high school and joined the National Guard in 1931, in the early years of the Great Depression.

"The first half of the 30s I took every dime I could earn every place," he said.

During the second half of the 30s he found a bunch of farm jobs, until 1939, when he found work as a welder with the Edgerton Highway Trailer. He worked for the Edgerton Highway Trailer for 40 years, but his work would be interrupted for four-and-a-half years.

After nine years in the National Guard, he switched gears and served in the United States Army Infantry from 1940-1945.

It was during that time he married his wife of 72 years, Mildred Anderson, on April 8, 1941.

"I guess my life was the best after I got married," he said. "It was the best move I ever made."

During his service with the Army, Everett was stationed in a number of places, including Louisiana, Australia, New Guinea, India and Burma. Even though he bounced around a

lot, he said Mildred was able to live with him most of the time.

"Not every night, but almost day and night. She got along good in the trailer camp down south too," he said.

The two had four children together, three boys and one girl, and Everett credited his wife for raising the children, while he worked hard to provide for his family. In addition to working for the Edgerton Highway Trailer after he was discharged from the Army, he farmed 152 acres of land at 4205 County Highway N, beginning in 1956.

He retired in 1978, and continued his travels with Mildred by his side.

As a longtime resident of Edger-

Middleton arrested on six charges; maximum sentence is 21 years

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

Rock County Sheriff's deputies arrested Nathan C. Middleton on Wednesday, Nov. 13 on six charges in connection with burning the corpse of a woman Middleton said died at his house after they had sex and she took an unknown drug on Oct. 27. The charges are hiding a corpse, mutilating a corpse, failure to notify the coroner of a death, solicitation of prostitution, possession of marijuana, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Two of the charges, hiding a corpse and mutilating a corpse, are felonies. If Middleton is convicted on all charges and the maximum sentence and maximum fine for each is imposed, he would serve 21 years in prison and owe \$62,500.

Middleton has been held in the Rock County jail on a probation violation since deputies went to a rental house he shares with his fiancée and his five-month old daughter on U.S. Highway 14 in Porter township, just west of the intersection with Tolles Road, on Nov. 1. The deputies had been alerted by the police in Fitchburg that a Madison woman reported missing on Oct. 28, Aprina S. Paul, might have died in the house.

The police found bone fragments in a burn pit to the west of the house, and charred scraps of clothing and a purse in the burn barrel behind the house. The bones proved to be human.

Middleton later told the police Paul answered an ad he placed on the



NATHAN C. MIDDLETON

internet, and he drove to Fitchburg to pick her up on Oct. 27. Middleton said he brought Paul back to the house, paid her for sex, and smoked marijuana with her. He said Paul took an unknown drug, and when he woke up next to her in bed the next morning she was dead. Middleton said he hid her corpse under a pickup truck in the yard before his fiancée came home, then sent his fiancée to the store while he dug a pit, moved Paul's body into the pit, and buried it.

The police believe there's more to Middleton's story than he's telling. Specifically, they're skeptical about his claim that Paul died after taking an unknown drug. But Paul's remains were so badly burned (Middleton told the police he burned her body all day for three days in a row) that it's unlikely a cause of death will ever be determined.

On the day Middleton was arrested, Sheriff Robert B. Spoden told a reporter from the *Janesville Gazette* that without knowing how Paul died it would be difficult for the district attorney to prove a homicide charge. Spoden said investigators will continue to try to piece together the sequence of events inside the rental house on the night Middleton said Paul died, and that additional charges against Middleton might be forthcoming.

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