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News

## Crime specialists keep busy at county's forensic science lab

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By Ann Zaniewski, Journal Register News Service

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At the Oakland County Sheriff's Office Forensic Science Laboratory, more than a dozen people are available to analyze evidence that is often a key part of bringing criminals to justice.

The lab first opened in 1972 in the main jail building. Kent Gardner, supervisor of the forensic science laboratory, said the expanded 11,500-square-foot lab opened in its new location in the county complex in 2003 and now handles about 3,000 original cases a month.

The lab is equipped to analyze firearms, blood spatters, fingerprints, tire marks, drugs and other types of evidence. Local police agencies who need DNA, trace evidence or serology tests have to turn to the Michigan State Police.

Oakland's crime lab technicians each specialize in certain disciplines. Their analysis can be what seals a criminal case.

Forensic Lab Specialist Rob Charlton recently recalled a case in which his analysis of a footwear impression found on a piece of paper on the floor of a car involved in a hit-and-run helped police connect the crime to the driver.

Another specialist, Megan Moore, analyzes bullets, which she said have markings that make them as unique as fingerprints.

In the lab's chemistry area, colorful pictures hang on the wall showing examples of the crystalline tree-branch shapes that form when chloride is added to cocaine as part of a test used to confirm whether a substance is an illegal drug.

The lab is connected to the Automated Fingerprint Identification System, a database of fingerprints that officials say can be a useful tool in linking criminals to a crime.

It is also connected to the Integrated Ballistics Information System, which works like AFIS but with firearms information. Only Oakland's crime lab, Detroit's crime lab and the state police have the system.

The technicians' jobs also take them outside the lab, as they are often called out to crime scenes to process evidence.

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