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Munroe leads class yesterday. His program is the only one of its kind in Canada.

# Winnipeg's CRIME-SCENE school

*Program trains young officers  
to investigate serial murders*

By Bruce Owen

CONST. Dick Munroe is on his knees, shovel in hand, telling a group of young police officers how to dig up a grave.

When he clears away a bit of loose dirt, he tells his crime-scene students to come in closer, so they each get a whiff of the rancid flesh.

"Your ground will be sticky," he says, rubbing his hand with the gamy soil. "That's the goo that comes with decomposition."

Yesterday's grave digging, and the preservation of any and all evidence found in it, capped the first day of a new training program sanctioned by the Winnipeg Police Service for rookie officers. The program is the only one of its kind in Canada.

The training exercise Munroe has created is intended to prepare young officers for the possibility of them becoming

involved in a serial murder case at the ground level, and how not to make mistakes by rushing through a scene and ignoring what could be crucial evidence.

Like chewed gum.

As Munroe combs through the grave — it's full of butcher's meat and bones he buried two months ago — he explains a "killer" could have easily spat out a piece of chewed gum into the grave. So each spoonful of dirt scooped out should be sifted at least twice to uncover it. That gum contains DNA which could eventually identify the killer.

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— Const. Dick Munroe

"The only truism in police work is the forensics," Munroe says. "These officers have their whole police career ahead of them. They might as well get it right."

Ideally, he says police should take at least three days to unearth a shallow grave.

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# Crime-scene

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But digging up a grave is just part of it; you have to find it first.

As a body rots beneath the ground, the chest cavity caves in. That creates a small depression on the ground above. When it rains, water collects there. In the fall, so do leaves.

"If you think there's something underneath, dig it up," Munroe says. "It's not always what you see, but what you think."

The mock exercise was designed and taught by Munroe, a 20-year veteran whose specialty is the gathering of

forensic evidence, specifically geological evidence. His work has solved murders and reconstructed biker shootings. He spent about 250 hours building this fake crime scene in St. Boniface Industrial Park, all on his own time.

Munroe also recently spent eight months working in British Columbia on the massive police investigation centred on Robert William Pickton's Port Coquitlam farm. Pickton will be tried on 15 counts of first-degree murder.

The victims were drug-addicted prostitutes from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. They are among 61 women who have vanished from the neighbourhood since the 1980s.

Munroe says his Vancouver experi-

ence showed him the need to prepare young officers here for the possibility a serial killer could show up in Winnipeg.

"This can happen anytime," he says. "We can't defend from it. We've got to be able to ramp up at any time."

His hope is that 10 per cent of the 1,200-member police force goes through his training program, so that at least a couple of officers on any shift have some knowledge of crime scene preservation.

## First 48 hours

"Every crime scene is fluid," he says. "The first 48 hours are crucial. You never know what you're going to see."

Besides identifying evidence, Munroe also wants to teach as many officers as he can the value of working as a team.

"Every crime is solved by a group," he says, as about two dozen officers search a nearby field. "By doing this, it just helps put the police service that much further ahead than others in the country."

In this scenario, the officers only learned of the grave through a "suicide

note" found in a fatal car wreck. The trainees were only given part of the note and had to find Munroe's crime scene on their own from clues within the note. Their subsequent search of the area found the grave, plus a knife and some jewelry.

There could be more graves in the area — Munroe isn't telling. Another three groups will get similar training at other "crime scenes" set up by Munroe over the next few months.

The idea is to map out each crime scene, talk about what the officers learned and then develop it all into a training manual.

However, if they walk away with anything, it's this: Respect for the victim.

"That's why I do it," Munroe says. "You have to have respect for the victim. It's also incumbent if you know something to pass it on. I've had great training with the police service. What I'm doing now is basically payback."