

No match for Lefkow prints - DNA on cigarette, broken window fail to bring new leads

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Investigators have not been able to find a match for a fingerprint recovered from a broken window at the home where two members of a federal judge's family were fatally shot last week, sources close to the investigation said Tuesday.

The print, which came from the window that the killer may have used to get into the house Feb. 28, has been processed and did not match any known print ever submitted to the FBI, sources said.

The print also does not match any member of the family of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow, investigators said.

The Tribune reported in Tuesday's editions similar findings for DNA evidence from the house. The genetic material found on a cigarette butt left in the kitchen sink did not lead to a match in any database. But investigators are hopeful that it could be used to link a suspect to the crime scene.

Because testing of evidence from the scene of the slayings so far has failed to produce a suspect in the murders, sources close to the murder probe said Tuesday that the task force handling the case is settling in for what could be a more lengthy investigation.

Michael Lefkow, 64, husband of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow, and Donna Humphrey, 89, the judge's mother, were found slain in the basement of the Lefkow house on the North Side Feb. 28. Each had been killed by point-blank gunshots to the forehead, investigators said.

Also Tuesday, sources said two .22-caliber shell casings found in the house the night of the slayings have been processed. Ballistics testing shows the rounds were fired from a single weapon, which has yet to be recovered.

An examination of the casings did not uncover any usable fingerprints.

More than a week after the killings and days after the sketches of two men wanted for questioning were released to the public, investigators said no one had emerged as a lead suspect in the case, and no one was being held by police.

Evidence technicians returned to the house in the 5200 block of North Lakewood Avenue Tuesday to re-examine the scene for more clues.

Investigators were seeking more shell casings, sources said, and also removed four doors, including the front one, of the house to scour it for evidence. Analysts could be seen moving through the yard and around the house with small trowels before 10 a.m. as several squad cars remained parked on the Lefkows' block.

The genetic material from the cigarette butt has been compared to more than 2.27 million DNA profiles in databanks, but the test has not produced a match to a convicted felon.

The early stages of the investigation have focused on the supporters of jailed white supremacist Matthew Hale, who is in isolation and awaiting sentencing at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in downtown Chicago. Judge Lefkow had enforced

an appellate court's ruling against Hale in a copyright infringement case, and he was later convicted of soliciting her murder.

Dozens with connections to Hale's group, and others like it, have been questioned, but so far their alibis have held up, investigators said. On Tuesday, members of the task force, made up of Chicago police, the FBI and U.S. marshals said they are discussing long-term strategies for pursuing the case.

The task force has promised to pursue all angles and possible motives, including other cases Judge Lefkow and her attorney husband had handled.

With a DNA profile in hand and no known suspect, some investigators were likening the case to the 1993 Brown's Chicken massacre in Palatine. In that case, a tip eventually emerged that allowed investigators to match the genetic profile of a suspect to a DNA sample left on a piece of partially eaten chicken found in a restaurant garbage can. That person is one of two awaiting trial on murder charges in that case.

Task force members have fielded more than 600 tips in the case, investigators have said, and many have dealt with Hale's organization and associates.

On Monday night, prison officials at the MCC barred Hale's parents from further contact with him, Hale's mother, Evelyn Hutcheson, said Tuesday.

Hutcheson said authorities gave no reason for the ban. But she said she suspects it stems from Hale last week issuing a public statement, dictated to and released by his mother, in which Hale deplored the murders of Judge Lefkow's family and said "only an idiot" would think he was responsible for the slayings.

Hale is incarcerated in the MCC, a South Loop federal jail, under special administrative measures usually reserved for terrorism suspects.

According to court records, Hale's statement last week would appear to violate the special restrictions. In making calls to immediate family members, no portion of the conversation "shall be divulged in any manner to a third party," according to the federal regulations.

Hutcheson said she thought the regulations banned her only from relaying a message of violence from Hale.

Hutcheson said she and her former husband, Russell Hale, had been allowed to meet with their son separately twice a month on Tuesdays for an hour each at the prison. A thick glass separated them and they had to communicate by phone as authorities listened in, she said.

Both parents were also able to participate in a single, 15-minute phone call every Thursday morning with Hale, Hutcheson said. Those calls were monitored as well, she said.

Under the restrictions, Hutcheson said she has been told by Hale that he has no contact with other inmates. His family hasn't been allowed to touch or hug him since his arrest more than two years ago, she said.

A memorial service for Donna Humphrey is planned for 11 a.m. Saturday in St. James Presbyterian Church in Littleton, Colo.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO (color): A police officer carries one of the four doors removed from the Lefkow home Tuesday as investigators seek clues in the killings. Tribune photo by Charles Osgood.

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