

# The Rockford Squire

## Top Stories

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A CALL FOR CLUES - This billboard is currently located at M-6 (the South Beltline) and East Paris. Detectives and friends of Renee Pagel hope the image will lead witnesses to call Silent Observer with tips in the unsolved murder case.



Renee Pagel is pictured here with her three children. "These three kids are out there and they don't have a mom. They are hurting and they need our prayers," said Chris Crandle, long-time friend of Pagel

## "Time is on my side in this case"

by BETH ALTENA

Lead detective in the case of a murdered Rockford woman said he hopes a billboard with Renee Pagel's picture and the number for Silent Observer will yield additional clues.

"I will never put a time line on this case. Time is on my side," said Kent County Sheriff Detective E.J. Johnson. Forensic tests are still underway in the murder case.

Pagel was stabbed to death in her own bed in her home on 9050 13 Mile Road, on August 5, 2006. Pagel, mother of a three-year-old and a pair of seven-year-old twins, worked for Kent Career Technical Center as a health teacher.

She was killed the day after she came home from the hospital after donating a kidney to the father of one of her students. It was also days before her divorce from husband Michael Pagel was to become final.

Johnson said the case is very much still under investigation, and that state budget cuts have affected the speed at which forensic evidence can be processed.

"The Michigan State Police forensic teams process this information and they have murders out there before us," he commented. He added that some tests are complete while others are underway.

"There are thousands to hundreds of thousands of fibers gathered at a scene. It takes a while to identify each of them," he said.

Michael Pagel has been identified as a suspect in the case, and according to Johnson, is the only suspect who has not been cooperative during the investigation. He is currently living in West Michigan with custody of his three children.

"The only one we have not voluntarily interviewed in this case is the husband," Johnson said. "In a case where the mother of your children is murdered, you would expect cooperation."

Police conducted a search of Pagel's residence in December and confiscated numerous items, including his home computer. Johnson said the computer is among items under forensic investigation.

"We can get all kinds of stuff from computers," he said. "We can get deleted things, hidden things."

Chris Crandle, friend of Pagel's who has worked hard to keep the case in the public eye, hopes the billboard will spark some recollection that may help crack the case.

"Someone had to drive there that night," she said. "It's still possible that someone will remember something - maybe it could be something small, but it could be the one thing that will catch her killer," she explained.

Crandle said this week has been hard for her. Pagel's estate sale was held April 20 and April 21. "It was so hard, to go to her house and see her personal stuff. Through this whole thing, we haven't been able to grieve, to put her to rest. We haven't seen her body or been able to say goodbye."

She said the loss really hit hard with the billboard going up, the sale and the frustration of knowing Renee's killer is walking free, enjoying the life she has lost.

"I was on the very field at Meadowridge Elementary where I went last year with Renee," she said. "When the billboard went up, the first thought through my head was, 'This is so great, I have to call Renee.'"

She calls the donation of the billboard an "astronomical gift." Like Crandle, the police are hopeful the reminder will help in the case.

"We get Silent Observer calls in," said Johnson. "Everything we get we check out."

Friends of Pagel's put out flyers late last year in hopes of encouraging potential witnesses to come forward.

The flyers with Pagel's picture, an offer of reward money and the a number to reach Detective E.J. Johnson were torn down from many of their locations. The volunteers who put them up are frustrated.

Joyce Schaner is another friend of Pagel's. She is determined to follow the case through until justice is done and the killer is caught. Schaner and others have posted over 50 of the flyers hoping more information will come to light.

"One person out there who has one tip could make all the difference. They might not realize how important their information is," Schaner commented.

Schaner said she and Pagel met as young women just out of high school. She said she and Pagel talked by phone every day and she has been in close contact with investigators throughout the case.

Detective Johnson said the department appreciates the efforts of Pagel's friends. "It just shows that there are people out there who care about Renee and they are trying to help us as much as we are trying to help them. It's nice to keep it in the media and remind people we are still working it."

Television and print media have followed the case, and in October 2006 the file was accidentally released to reporters. Supposed to be sealed during the investigation, the file was handed over due to human error. Among other things, it revealed that authorities felt a break-in at Pagel's home prior to her murder was not a robbery. In the incident, photographs and divorce documents were removed from Pagel's home.

It was reported that the judge in the Pagel divorce was granting custody of the couple's three children to Renee and ordering Michael to pay \$1,000 a month in child support. He was allegedly advised to get a better job to pay for the support.

Kent County Sheriff Lt. Roger Parent said the case is still very much under active investigation. "Detectives are still doing interviews, still waiting on forensic tests," he stated. "In no way at all is this becoming a cold case. It is still a fresh, active investigation."

Friends of Renee Pagel remain committed to raising money to sponsor a day of programming on 91.3 WCSG, a Christian radio station, in her honor. The sponsorship day is July 29 - Pagel's birthday.

Anyone interested in contributing to WCSG toward this pledge in honor of Renee is encouraged to send checks to WCSG, 1001 E. Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49502-5023. It must be identified as July 29 Day Sponsor. Donations are tax-deductible and a receipt will be issued by WCSG.

Crandle and friends hope media attention may result in the lead that helps investigators make an arrest. They hope someone saw something around the time of Renee Pagel's murder or in the days before.

Those with information are asked to contact Silent Observer at (616) 774-2345 or Officer Johnson at (616) 632-6135. "For me this is one of those situations where time is on my side," said Johnson. "It is my job to make sure the family gets a thorough and professional investigation."