

McMenamin's friends strive for closure

By JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

They won't let Tina's case die. Friends and family of former UNL student Tina McMenamin are trying to generate renewed interest in solving her murder after DNA testing recently released the man accused of the crime.

Gabel

The same blond hair that led police to arrest Gregory Gabel two years ago freed him in July when additional DNA testing done this spring showed the hair was not Gabel's.

Emotionally, McMenamin's friends and family are back at square one with no apparent end to the ordeal in sight.

"There's no closure without a trial," Bernadette McMenamin, Tina's mother, said. "It's still an unsolved crime."

Investigators are continuing to

look at the case, and they still consider Gabel a viable suspect, Lincoln Police Capt. Jim Peschong said.

The police are reevaluating the conclusions that led them to Gabel and working to clear up any remaining questions from the first investigation, Peschong said.

Police again are interviewing people from the first investigation in search of new evidence in the 3-year-old trail.

The case began on July 25, 1995, when McMenamin's roommate, Sarah Bognich, came home to their south Lincoln apartment to find Tina's body.

Bognich and McMenamin, friends from their days at Omaha's Gross High School, had just completed their freshman year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Police reports said McMenamin was sexually assaulted, beaten and stabbed.

Bognich described McMenamin as "a fun-loving person who loved people."

The police conducted a thorough investigation, but leads were few and an arrest was not made until spring

1996. During the past two years, court hearings have focused on the admissibility of those initial DNA tests and whether Gabel was competent to stand trial before he was released this summer.

Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey said this was the first murder case in Lancaster County that used the mitochondrial DNA test.

The test determined that the hair found clutched in McMenamin's hand did not come from Gabel, Lacey said.

Mitochondria are in the area between a cell's nucleus and cell wall and produce energy for the cell. Mitochondrial DNA tests are used when the sample is in poor condition.

The strand of hair in the McMenamin case was damaged and included only part of the root, which was used up in the initial DNA test to arrest Gabel.

The results of the test, however, could remain an important piece of evidence in continuing the investigation.

"It is a logical assumption that the hair belonged to someone (McMenamin) was struggling with,"

“*There's no closure without a trial. It's still an unsolved crime.*”

BERNADETTE MCMENAMIN
Tina McMenamin's mother

Lacey said.

To help with the cost of further DNA testing and investigations, Bognich and a friend, Lou Friend, started a trust fund in Tina's name at the National Bank of Commerce.

The DNA test that freed Gabel cost about \$10,500. There also was a six-month waiting list because only three places in the United States can test mitochondrial DNA.

If McMenamin's case is solved, any additional money will be used for other murder investigations in Lincoln.

Bognich and Friend also released to the media a video of McMenamin and friends at a football game in the hopes that live footage may help

someone remember something about that day.


"Somebody knows something," Friend said, "and if the person responsible is out there, I believe it will happen again."

Crimestoppers still is offering a \$15,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person or persons responsible for the murder.

"Remember, this could have been anybody," Friend said, "anybody's daughter, any college student."

Donations can be made to the fund to help pay for the investigation by sending donations to NBC Bank, c/o Tina McMenamin, 1248 O St., Lincoln, NE 68508.

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