

District Court considers DNA tests for rape case

■ Vinson Champ has been linked to three rapes at college campuses.

BY JAKE BLEED
Senior staff writer

A man accused of raping a woman at Union College in 1997 appeared in Lancaster County District Court on Tuesday to hear a description of a DNA identification procedure that could link him to the rape, Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey said.

Vinson Champ, a professional comedian, was brought to Lincoln in March 1998 from Pasadena, Calif., where he was arrested for attempted rape. He was later linked to sexual assaults at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis., and St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa.

The attack at Union College took place Feb. 2, 1997, when a 27-year-old woman was playing piano in the basement of the E. Dick building on campus, court documents said.

Linking Champ to the sexual assaults are similarities in how the crimes were carried out and in potential DNA information taken from semen samples found at the scenes of the sexual assaults.

In sexual assaults connected to Champ, the attacker asked about sexual history, forced anal sex using his own saliva for lubrication and, after the attack, asked his victim to pray for him.

Pubic hair and bodily fluids found at the scene of the attacks could also be linked to Champ if new processes are adopted to present DNA evidence in court, Lacey said.

New methods of DNA identification must be approved by the state Supreme Court, Lacey said. District courts must present the new method and satisfy six criteria to gain Supreme Court sanction.

"Before evidence can be presented, the court has to prove the test is accurate and reliable and is generally accepted by the scientific community," Lacey said.

Dr. Robin Cotton of the Selmar Diagnostic Clinic in Maryland and

Melissa Weber of the New Hampshire State Forensic Laboratory presented new DNA identification methods in Lancaster County District Court on Tuesday.

New DNA identification processes are important, Lacey said, because they narrow the possibility of mistakenly identifying an individual.

DNA identifications often use statistical probability to describe the accuracy of the test. The FBI maintains DNA samples from several ethnic groups against which DNA identifications can be compared. Experts can compare the identifications and come up with a specific probability.

Lacey said newer processes currently being presented in court would increase the accuracy of DNA identification in Nebraska.

"With these new tests, the ratios are so high in some cases that the chance of it being anyone other than the person charged with the crime is almost nonexistent," Lacey said.

The state Supreme Court has accepted several forms of DNA identification, said Assistant County Attorney John Colburn.

Group focuses on pregnancy rate

BY TINA HARGENS
Staff writer

Through workshops and advertisements in Lincoln, a city-county group is working to reduce the teen-pregnancy rate in Lincoln.

The Lincoln/Lancaster County Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Coalition had its monthly meeting Tuesday and discussed the status of several teen-age pregnancy awareness programs.

The coalition was created 12 years ago to promote awareness about teen-age pregnancy in Lincoln and the surrounding communities.

"We don't provide direct services but work with organizations that do," said Bonnie Coffey, executive director of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission and vice president of the coalition.

Family Services, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Cedars Youth Services are just a few of the organizations that work with the coalition to provide workshops to teach teens and their families about teen pregnancy.

Last week, the coalition helped sponsor a seminar called Unequal Partners in the Nebraska Union. About 140 people attended the program, which addressed the issue of adolescent girls having sexual relationships with older men.

"Generally, if a 13-year-old girl gets pregnant, it isn't because of the 14-year-old neighbor boy," said Julie Anderson of the Lincoln Medical Education Foundation for Young Families Program.

The workshop focused on decisions families can make regarding the legal system. Reporting illegal sexual relations is one area the program addressed.

Workshops are also directed to the teens themselves.

Survival Skills is a program sponsored by the Lincoln YWCA and Planned Parenthood that offers counseling and tutoring services to teens in the Lincoln area.

Tiffany Mullison-Kauffman, Survival Skills coordinator, said once teen-agers join the program, they can stay in the program throughout high school.

Wise Guys, another coalition program, is designed to teach young men about their sexuality and responsibility.

To attract public awareness, the coalition has spent two years creating an advertisement promotion. Coffey said the coalition now just needs funding in order to start the campaign.

The coalition plans to use the ads on billboards, bookmarks and in student newspapers.

The advertisements use student parents from Lincoln High, Lincoln

"A 13-year-old friend isn't the best source of sex information."

BONNIE COFFEY
executive director of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission

Northeast and Tender Loving Care—a program for teens with children.

Susan Powers-Alexander, director of Education and Training for Planned Parenthood of Lincoln, said the coalition would like to bring the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Planned Parenthood and other organizations together to address other issues such as the influence alcohol has on sexual decisions.

For right now, the coalition will continue to promote awareness of teenage pregnancy through Survival Skills, Wise Guys and soon the advertising campaign.

"People need to know there's a challenge of teen pregnancy," Coffey says, "A 13-year-old friend isn't the best source of sex information."

The coalition did not have the latest teen-age pregnancy statistics for Lincoln on hand at its meeting. Coffey said those numbers should be available next month.

Anthrax vaccine disputed in House

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawmakers said Tuesday they were skeptical of Defense Department assurances that the anthrax vaccine is safe and shots given to soldiers are having no effect on troop readiness and morale.

Defense Secretary William Cohen last year ordered all 2.4 million active-duty and reserve troops to get shots of the anthrax vaccine as protection against biological warfare. Some 340,000 service members have been immunized so far. About 200 to 300 have refused to take it because of concerns about its safety and efficacy.

At a House hearing, lawmakers questioned Pentagon officials' assertions that the number of adverse reactions to the shots was small and there was no impact on troop readiness.

"Either the Defense Department is being less than forthcoming about objections being raised (among troops), or they have their heads buried in the sand," said Rep. Dan Burton, R-Ind., chairman of the House Government

Reform Committee.

Military officers and federal health officials have repeatedly said the drug is safe and inoculation is the only known way to prevent rapid deaths of troops who inhale anthrax.

"We are confident that the anthrax vaccine is safe and effective," said Kathryn Zoon of the Food and Drug Administration.

But Kwai-Cheung Chan of the Government Accounting Office, the research arm of Congress, said his review of the studies available on the anthrax vaccine since the 1960s showed its long-term safety is unknown.

He also said there has been no specific study of the efficacy of the licensed vaccine in humans who have inhaled anthrax spores. Such studies have been conducted using guinea pigs, rabbits and monkeys.

The only study focusing on humans involved mill workers and others whose skin was exposed by touching infected animals. Anthrax is a naturally occur-

ring bacteria found in domesticated animals.

"You have not tested this vaccine thoroughly," Burton said.

But Dr. Sue Bailey, the Defense Department's assistant secretary of health, said it would be unethical to test anthrax spores on humans.

Chan said a recent survey of soldiers at the Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii indicated women had a higher reaction rate to the vaccine than men. Twice the number of women reported they missed one or more duty shifts after a shot, and women were more than twice as likely to report fever, chills or general malaise.

"Clearly, we need to determine if there is any gender difference" through further research, Bailey conceded.

The FDA specified troops are to have six shots with an annual booster to ensure they are properly inoculated. But Chan said no studies had determined the optimum number of shots required.

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