

LOCAL/REGIONAL

WEATHER
EDITORIAL

Murdered prostitute was a police informant

Cheryl Van Horn, a 24-year-old prostitute who was murdered with a single shotgun blast to the chest last month in an Easton hotel parking lot, had worked as a police informant, the Call-Chronicle has learned.

Less than a week before Van Horn's body was found Nov. 14 in a remote parking lot behind the Sheraton-Easton Inn in downtown Easton, an Allentown vice detective testified in Lehigh County Court that Van Horn had helped police in some drug cases and would continue to help police.

The murdered woman told him that she was "doing some type of work with the police department" and was working with an Easton vice detective.

Van Horn's role as a police informant adds to the list of possible motives for her death in the early morning hours of Nov. 15. Other motives, police and street sources say, include prostitution-related activities and drugs.

Court records show that the Palmer Township woman pleaded guilty to prostitution in 1982 and again this year and was arrested three more times since February of this year for soliciting. Two of her

five arrests included charges of robbing the men who allegedly hired her for sex.

Some sources say Van Horn had a \$300-a-day drug habit at the time of her death, and court records show she was previously involved in two drug rehabilitation programs.

On Nov. 8, Van Horn appeared before Lehigh County Judge David E. Mellenberg to be sentenced on a guilty plea to a prostitution charge stemming from a March 23 arrest in Allentown. According to a court record of the proceedings, Allentown vice detective William Warmkessel told the judge at a sidebar conference that Van Horn had assisted po-

lice in several drug-related investigations and that her assistance and information had contributed to the success of several of those investigations.

Warmkessel told the judge that Van Horn had "walked" police into situations where they were able to make drug "buys."

The judge told Warmkessel that after imposing the sentence, the incentive for Van Horn to continue assisting police could be lost. Warmkessel responded, "I understand that," but he noted that Van Horn had indicated she would continue to work with police.

Van Horn's public defender in

that case, Atty. Danette Dean, said she was unaware of her client's work with police until the Nov. 8 proceedings. She said Van Horn never asked her advice on whether she should cooperate with police in that manner.

In a previous court proceeding, Van Horn said she had only an 8th-grade education.

Efforts to contact Warmkessel for comment on Van Horn's use as a police informant were unsuccessful. Several telephone messages from a reporter to Warmkessel's office at police headquarters went un-



Cheryl Van Horn
... murdered Nov. 14

In addition, Van Horn's public defender in Northampton County said

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Members of Berks County Christian motorcycle club display message from Scripture on their sidcar and club 'colors' on their back.
Call-Chronicle photos—John F. Simitz

'Heaven's Angels' preach The Gospel from a Honda

By RON DEVLIN
Of the Call-Chronicle

The pack of motorcycles, riding two by two over a winding Berks County country road, looks pretty much like any other.

The riders, many bearded, wear black leather jackets, aviator sunglasses and pilot powerful 1100-cc. cycles that roar effortlessly over the rural countryside.

Their colors flying in the wind, the Agape Riders conjure images of the outlaw motorcycle gangs that traveled the highways in packs two decades ago. In those days, the Hell's Angels made themselves part of pop culture and movies like "Easy Rider" and the music of rock groups like Steppenwolf aroused a generation of bikers to "get out on the highway" and look for adventure.

But take a closer look and you find that there's more to the Boyertown area club than shiny chrome engines and riding down the highway in formation.

Their denim vests may look like those of Hell's

Angels, but there are no winged-helmeted skulls on the backs of these bikers.

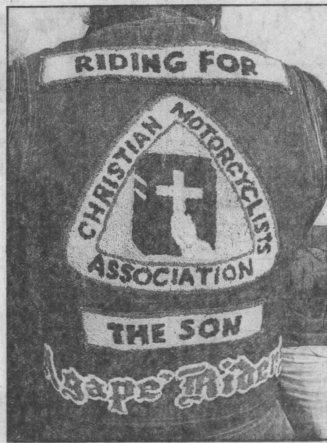
Instead, there's a cross. Christ's cross. Agape Riders is a Christian motorcycle club. And its mission is to carry the message of "Christian love" — which is what Agape (A-gop-ay) means — to troubled youth, elderly shut-ins, disabled children and anybody else who will listen.

In the process, the riders hope to, in the words of one of the club's founders, "clean up the name of the biker."

It all started four years ago when Richard Grill put an ad in a church bulletin in an effort to find someone to ride with on weekends.

Grill, a 39-year-old machinist at Bally Ribbon Mills, had bought a Honda V-65 to save on transportation expenses when gasoline prices were climbing. But he liked it so much that he and his wife Linda wanted someone to share the companionship of bike riding.

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Aid cuts would be 'disaster'

Reagan budget plans worry city officials

By DAN HARTZELL
Of the Call-Chronicle

Nobody's pushing the panic button yet, but if President Reagan's proposed cuts in three major financial aid programs for cities take place, there won't be enough buttons to go around.

The general revenue-sharing, Community Development Block Grant and Urban Development Action Grant programs would be either reduced or eliminated under the administration's proposed budget cuts, according to news reports.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported the information last week, along with other details of the proposed plan to reduce the soaring federal deficit, based on interviews with unnamed administration and congressional sources.

Television reports from the major networks have provided similar information, and the Associated Press has listed the block grant program as a "candidate for dramatic reduction." The other two programs are targeted for elimination, according to other press reports. The administration's package will be considered by Congress when it reconvenes in January.

John Kachmar, assistant to U.S. Rep. Don Ritter, R-15th District, said late last week that Ritter's office has had no confirmation that all three programs are targeted for elimination. Kachmar was skeptical that the administration would want to ax all three. "I would imagine that would cause havoc among the cities," Kachmar said.

While he hadn't spoken to Ritter since reports of the deficit reduction plan began to surface, Kachmar said, "I can't imagine Don Ritter supporting moves to eliminate those three [programs]."

But in the meantime, city officials are beginning to sweat at the thought of the elimination of such programs. Bethlehem expects to receive \$1.6 million in 1985 block grant funding, Allentown \$2.7 million and Easton, \$1.1 million.

Take that money away and in Bethlehem, for instance, funding for the following programs would disappear.

- ▶ Housing rehabilitation grants for low and moderate-income residents (\$567,500 for the grants and program administration earmarked for 1985).
- ▶ Sanborn Park improvements (\$405,000).
- ▶ Expansion of existing Salvation Army facility for clothing distribution to the needy (\$50,000).
- ▶ Acquisition of the Council of Spanish Speaking Organizations of the Lehigh Valley's existing facility (\$20,000).
- ▶ Acquisition of blighted properties for demolition and re-sale of property (\$70,000).
- ▶ Administrative costs for the Bethlehem Economic Development Corp. to implement economic growth programs (\$42,000).
- ▶ Administration costs of the Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority (\$48,000).
- ▶ Administrative costs for the block

Tree growers are harvesting good decisions

By ERVIN L. HAWK
Of the Call-Chronicle

Carbon County Christmas tree growers are expecting another banner year for tree sales.

Last year, Pennsylvania was second only to New York in the number of tree seedlings planted. There were more than 89 million Christmas tree seedlings planted in Pennsylvania during 1983, but only about 1.1 million were harvested. In Carbon County, more than 100,000 Christmas trees were cut for local

use or trucked to larger community sales centers last year, and the same number are expected to be cut this year, according to early orders. Nationwide, more than 30 million live trees are expected to be harvested this year.

Charles Yenser of Lehighton R.I., president of the Mid-East Penn Christmas Tree Growers Association, pointed out that it takes 8-12 years for a tree to reach the size most suitable for a Christmas tree, depending on the species. But tree growers have been very conscientious about replanting, and "it is

that planning ahead for many years that will give us the best crop in history this holiday season," he added.

The Mahoning Valley tree plantation owner said surveys show that most people still prefer a natural Yule tree rather than an artificial one. "They're fresher, they're prettier, and they bring a warmth and cheerfulness into a home that artificial trees can't match. And live trees are no fire hazard if the tree is watered," Yenser stressed.

He continued, "We tree growers believe this is going to be a record year for live trees, because people want to bring the traditionalism back that was always associated with the holidays. What's really important is that trees, in addition to being more fun to decorate when you don't have to first put them together, represent a great training device for children.

"With a live tree, youngsters can

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Outcome of Coaldale meeting on chief to be aired Dec. 18

Coaldale Borough Council, mayor and police chief met in closed session for more than two hours yesterday afternoon to air charges against the police chief, but the outcome of the meeting will not be disclosed until council meets at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 18.

Council President Geno Poli told the media after the meeting, no charges were made. "It was not an official meeting and no action was taken," he said. "I am certain we have come to a fruitful conclusion that will benefit the police chief and council. This will be discussed at our next meeting."

Councilman Richard Marek, chairman of the police committee, brought four charges against Chief Donald Butts at the last meeting of council on Nov. 20, and called for the chief's dismissal. Before asking council to act on the charges, Marek requested yesterday's closed session.

Although Butts attended yesterday's meeting, Poli said the chief has been off work on sick leave the last 10 days and that he could be off for a while, because he may require hospitalization.

Attending yesterday's session were the seven members of council, Mayor Theodore N. Bortnick, Butts and Patrolman John Yanchura of the Lansford Police Department, who represented the Fraternal Order of Police.

Marek's charges against Butts included neglect or violation of official duties, conduct unbecoming an officer and violation of orders.

Among the charges against Butts was that while the police chief was being paid by the borough for performing official police duties he was employed by the Schuylkill County Housing Authority as a guard during the monthly collection of rentals from last January through August.

MURDER

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swered. After hearing Warmness's testimony about Van Horn's work as a police informant, Mellenberg gave Van Horn a 6 to 12-month suspended sentence and placed her on 12 to 18 months' probation. He also ordered her to pay a \$300 fine or perform 100 hours of community service and ordered her to stay out of the area of Union to Allen streets and 4th to 12th streets — Allentown's prostitute "stroll" — between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.

The Call-Chronicle learned of the testimony for Van Horn from an untranscribed stenographic record of the sentencing. When the newspaper obtained an official copy of the transcript, the sidebar conference was deleted.

In addition to acting as an informant for Allentown police, Van Horn also told her public defender in Northampton County that she was working for Easton Police.

City, John Morganielli, who represented Van Horn in about three criminal cases, said Van Horn would sometimes talk to him — the most recent visit being a few days before her death — and told him that she was "working with the police."

Morganielli said his client specifically told him she was working with Frank Martin, an Easton police vice detective. Morganielli said Van Horn "never got into details" about what she was doing for police and he didn't ask. He said he thought her cooperation with police might help her case.

The public defender said Van Horn's professed work as an informant "seemed like it was really no big secret." He recalled talking about it with other people present.

"It may have become general information," Morganielli said. "It didn't seem like she was undercover."

Other known prostitutes in the Lehigh Valley told a reporter that it was common knowledge that Van Horn worked with police.

Martin was on vacation last week and could not be reached for comment on Van Horn's reported work as an informant.

Easton Police Lt. Carl Beers, who is heading the murder investigation, would neither confirm nor deny that Van Horn worked as an informant in Easton. He also declined to say if that was a prime motive in the death.

Beers said Van Horn's "lifestyle" provided many possible motives for her death. That lifestyle included not

"I have only been prostituting for a few months. The past few years of my life has been with my [three] kids and my boyfriend. We lived together for four years and he left me for a prostitute. He screwed me up."

Cheryl Van Horn to Judge Robert Freedberg

only prostitution contacts but also robbery victims and persons in the drug culture.

"Everything she did leads to many motives," Beers said. According to court records, Van Horn had some "juvenile problems" but no adult criminal record until Feb. 26, 1982, when she was arrested in Easton for prostitution, robbery and theft for allegedly taking a wallet containing \$50 from a man who solicited her for sex.

Later that year, Van Horn would tell Northampton County Judge Robert A. Freedberg, "I have only been prostituting for a few months. The past few years of my life has been with my [three] kids and my boyfriend. We lived together for four years, and he left me for a prostitute. He screwed me up."

Freedberg gave the first-time offender a 4 to 18-month suspended sentence and placed her on probation. Van Horn was also undergoing mental evaluation at the time of sentencing.

She was back in front of Judge Freedberg later that year as a probation violator for alleged use of "illegal street drugs," according to a probation office document. She was placed in the Northampton County Prison for a time, later paroled and ordered to attend the Eagleview Rehabilitation Center in Montgomery County. She left that program in January of this year, according to court records, after she had "some problems" there.

A probation report said she continued to abuse narcotics and was sent to the Endeavor drug program in Bethlehem. She was discharged from there, too, after she reportedly refused to attend the sessions.

In July of this year, Van Horn was found in violation of her parole from the 1982 offense and served the remainder of her sentence in the county prison.

By then, however, she had been arrested three more times, accord-

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ing to court records, and would be arrested again by the next month.

The first arrest was in February in Manhattan for prostitution. Then followed arrests in March in Allentown for prostitution. In May in Easton for prostitution, robbery and related offenses for allegedly taking a customer's wallet with \$20 in it and in August in Easton for prostitution. Van Horn's addresses throughout the two years have been listed in court records as the Hotel Huntington in downtown Easton, her family's home in Palmer Township and the county prison. Several weeks before her death, she checked into the Luxury Budget Inn in Palmer Township, where rooms start at \$23.99 a day. It was to be her last address.

At the Nov. 8 sentencing, her Lehigh County public defender said that her client was looking for a job at a garment factory and convenience store and regularly visited two of her three children who lived in the Easton area.

Although police have released few specifics about Van Horn's murder, the Call-Chronicle has learned that the woman was seen walking in downtown Easton on the night of her murder. Sometime in the early morning hours, several hours before her body was discovered around 6:30 a.m., someone apparently placed a shotgun close to or against her chest and fired one shell at a downward angle.

The shell contained number 6 shot, which is generally used for hunting small game, which was in season at the time of the murder.

Police have not said if any drugs were found on Van Horn's person or even if a purse was found at the scene.

Toxicology test results have not been returned to investigators.

Officially, the investigation of Cheryl Van Horn's murder is "still wide open," according to Lt. Beers, and no arrests are planned "in the near future."

About 24 hours after Van Horn was killed, 39-year-old John W. Thomas of Allentown was mortally wounded with a single shot to the head as he stepped from a car in the 600 block of Turner Street, Allentown.

Although police investigating the two murders decline to say they are connected, that possibility apparently has not been ruled out.

Thomas, who died several days later in the Lehigh Valley Hospital Center without regaining consciousness, reportedly was an acquaintance of Van Horn's.

Unlike the shotgun blast that claimed Van Horn's life, police said a large caliber gun was used to kill Thomas.

Allentown police detective Ronald Manescu, assigned to the Thom-

as murder, said he is exploring numerous leads and possibilities.

"I've heard a lot of things," Manescu said, "and we have talked to a lot of people."

As in the Van Horn murder, there is speculation that Thomas' death could be drug-related. Police and other sources said Thomas had a substantial cocaine and crank (a stimulant) habit.

Van Horn reportedly used the same type of drugs. An Allentown man, who claimed he was with Thomas from about 9 a.m. Nov. 15 until a few hours before he was shot, said he and Thomas and another unidentified person spent much of the day using drugs and making drug deals in Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton.

Police, however, have not disclosed whether any drugs were found on Thomas when he was discovered shortly after a 4 a.m.

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