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RAPE KIT PROCESSING

How It Works And Fails To Work

By JAMIE MAFFEO And ANDY THIBAULT

NEW HAVEN – A 17-year-old girl who reported a sexual assault in July was told by New Haven Police detectives who met with her in August that her rape kit evidence would be tested in two to three months.

Connecticut law requires police officers to submit such evidence to the state Forensic Science Laboratory in Meriden within 10 days of collection. Then, testing must occur within 60 days. Upon learning of this particular case, The Winsted Citizen compared Connecticut's performance with other states and found that since reforms enacted in 2015, Connecticut has a better record than many others.

Nationally, hundreds of thousands of rape kits go untested.

Studies by the Journal of Criminal Justice and the National Institute of Justice showed a wide range of failures to process evidence, ranging up to 400,000 over five years starting in 2014. The advocacy group Joyful Heart Foundation – which is still gathering data nationally – documented about 90,000 untested kits last year in 37 states and Washington, D.C.

Connecticut had a backlog of nearly 1,200 cases in 2015. The state characterizes testing beyond 60 days of submission as back-

logged. Lab director Dr. Guy Vallaro said Connecticut has not had a backlog since 2018.

Vallaro told The Winsted Citizen average processing time in Connecticut now is 37 days. He said survivors can access a website to track the processing of their evidence. There also is a Spanish version of the website. The Connecticut Alliance To End Sexual Violence has the TRACK YOUR KIT button at its website www.endsexualviolencect.org.

The state law led to a strict process, Vallaro said, resulting in DNA screening for male suspects within days of receiving a rape kit. If the evidence is significant, it is submitted to a national database with a profile.

"It's really criminal to have these kits sitting on shelves, it's horrible," said Donna Palomba, a survivor who founded the group Jane Doe No More in Naugatuck. "I do think having it processed within a month to two months is reasonable."

Jane Doe No More offers free self-defense programs for women and girls. There also is a closed Facebook group for survivors of sexual crimes to get support. Palomba, whose case was the subject of a New York Times Maga-

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RUNWAY RECYCLE



Photograph by Judy Griesedieck

Recycle Chic in Winsted returns to the American Mural Project Oct. 21 at 7 p.m. Model and designer Jennifer Sullivan is shown at 2019 gala. Designers were asked to register as soon as possible last month as they were invited to build wearable pieces made of at least 75 percent recyclable and/or trash-rescued materials. Story on page 6.

Health Insurers Seek Big Rate Increases

By EMILIA OTTE
CTExaminer.com

HARTFORD – Debra Dauphinais, owner of Bicycles East, a bicycle shop in Glastonbury, said she hasn't been able to find a health insurance plan that she can afford for her four employees.

She said she's tried both private plans and plans on AccessHealthCT, the state insurance exchange. She's switched between plans. Nothing is affordable.

"People are paying, or have paid up to \$10,000 a year in premiums and still have a \$6,500 a year deductible," said Dauphinais. "So after people pay their premiums, they don't actually obtain health care because they don't have the money left to do that."

Dauphinais said her employees tell her that they don't go to the doctor because they can't afford it. And that extends to her as well. Dauphinais said that despite she and her husband together paying over \$18,000 in premiums, she still had a \$1,300 deductible. Knowing the cost of going to the doctor, she lived with leg pain for eight months rather than get an appointment.

"Basically, we paid \$18,000 for no health care," said Dauphinais.

Dauphinais was part of a group standing outside the legislative



Photograph courtesy of CTExaminer.com

Protesters at the Capitol.

office building in Hartford last month in protest of proposed rate increases from the state's largest insurers.

Anthem is requesting a 10 per-

cent rate increase for individuals and 15 percent increase for small businesses. Together, the compa-

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SPICE CHRONICLES An Adventure In Flavor

By ALAN THAYER

Editor's Note: Chef Alan Thayer tells a little about himself and the dream he realized at a shop in the woods in this debut column.

COLEBROOK – My background is in French cooking. I

have worked my way through many kitchens including Fine Bouche in Essex. My passion is for food and spice.

My culinary journey took a turn when I transitioned into the non-

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ON THE JOB

NYT Best-Selling Author Luanne Rice

Interview By
ELLA GANNON



Photograph by Kristina Loggio
LUANNE RICE

OLD LYME – New York Times best-selling author Luanne Rice of Old Lyme has written more than 30 novels. Her newest, "Last Night," is scheduled for release in December. Rice writes about love, family, nature and the sea. She writes by the ocean and at home with her cats: Emelina, Orian, Ivy and Patrick.

What inspires you?

It has always been family. When I was young, I was too daunted to write about family, so I wrote around family. I would write about things that mattered to my family and about things that brought us

together. Nature has always been a part of me and my writing – especially the beach and the ocean. As I got older, I began to try and understand my own family, our relationships and the emotions that come with it. My novels touch on

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AMERICAN MURAL PROJECT



Photo: Peter Brown

A three-dimensional mural—120 feet long and five stories high—honoring work

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Rape Kits

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zine article in 2018, said the two-month standard is understandable given the workload of police and lab staff. Anything beyond that is a serious problem, she said.

“We need to be cognizant of the fact that every day that goes by there’s more of a chance of that perpetrator hurting someone else,” said Palomba, who was sexually assaulted in her own home, suffered a “second attack” by police who accused her of lying and began an 11-year fight for justice that finally resulted in her attacker being arrested.

Nationally, explanations or excuses for the delays vary. Limited lab and police resources have been cited, along with bias, wide discretion for performing tests and expired statutes of limitations. Shortening the delays remains important for the ability to provide significant evidence that can either support convictions or aid in redressing wrongful arrests and convictions.

New Haven Police Capt. Rose Dell said her department typically brings rape kits to the lab once a week.

“Some may be expedited, if needed to be brought up sooner,” Dell said.



DANNEL MALLOY

Dell also was asked for the precise date the rape kit for the 17-year-old assaulted in July was brought to the lab. Dell was given the case number for this reported assault. As of press time, Dell had not provided the date.

“Connecticut has improved, but that doesn’t mean every police officer knows how it works,” said former Gov. Dannel Malloy, who oversaw the reforms. “Sooner is better. You have to have the right information to do the job.”

A recent Congressional Research Service Report cites data from other states. Here are a few samples:

- The Wisconsin Division of Forensic Sciences found the average turnaround time for DNA analysis in 2019 was 97 days. A year later it was 94.
- Maryland in 2020 reported a turnaround time of 124 days.



DONNA PALOMBA

- The average turnaround time for DNA analysis in Delaware in 2019 was about 34 days. The next year it was 27 days.



DR. GUY VALLARO

- In Montana, the average turnaround time for DNA testing 2019 was about 225 days. A year later it was about 275 days.

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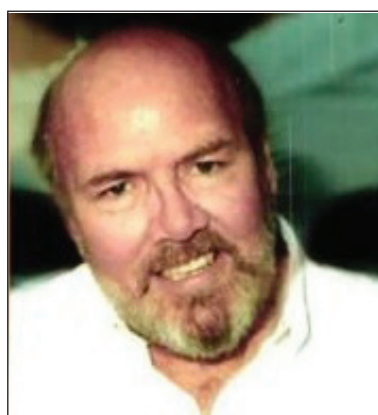
OBITUARY

Donald R. Bleuher

WINSTED – Donald R. Bleuher, 91, of Oak Brook, Illinois, died peacefully on the morning of Aug. 6. Don was born Feb. 24, 1932, the son of George and Agnes (O'Connor) Bleuher, and grew up in Winsted. He attended the Gilbert School and graduated from the University of Connecticut.

In 1957, Don met Rosemary DeSmedt and they were married for 64 years. Don and Rosemary had six children, 16 grandchildren and two great grandchildren, and resided in Villa Park, Illinois, for 38 years and then Oak Brook.

Don was a devoted husband, father, brother, grandfather, great grandfather, and beloved uncle of many nieces and nephews. Family and friends were central to his life. He made friends easily and was a committed correspondent, making it a point to keep in touch with those that he cared about. Don was in sales for the McCall Pattern Company for 40 years where he traveled throughout the Midwest. He and Rosemary developed many lifelong friends through Cursillo and their own small faith community. Don loved sports – most especially UConn basketball, the Chicago Cubs, Bears and Bulls – as well as reading, music, and a good cigar. Don was an unwaver-



Donald R. Bleuher

ing advocate for peace and justice, and volunteered for the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Pius X.

Don was preceded in death by his wife Rosemary, his brothers George Bleuher and Ernie Bleuher, and his sisters Eleanor Scalise and Marie Sherman Kimball. He is survived by his sister Dorothy Kovachich; his six children, Denise (Tim) Angst, Tracy (Pat) Pohl, Michael (Tracy), Chris (Maggie), Tim and Paul (Julie); his grandchildren and great grandchildren.

A time of remembrance and appreciation was to be held on Aug. 24 at Steuerle Funeral Home with the funeral mass at St. Pius X, 1025 E. Madison St., Lombard, IL.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

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