

Officers try digital approach to solve year-old homicides

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

Investigators with the Winston-Salem Police Department are asking for the public assistance in solving four unsolved homicides from 2014, and they are hoping that a new campaign will help.

On Thursday, March 5, a media conference was held to announce a new Internet campaign that investigators hope will bring them more leads in the 2014 deaths of the following: Delroy East on Jan. 1, Christopher R. Thompson on March 23, Christopher D. Jones on March 28 and Tyrahn R. Elliott on April 17. The police reported 15 homicides in 2014, with five of those cases still open, and four without leads.

The campaign focuses on advertisements on television and radio, which will lead viewers to video on Youtube.com about the homicides. The advertisements will focus on getting the attention of men and women ages 18 to 30 who live in the 27101 and 27105 ZIP codes where the four men were killed.

Captain Catrina Thompson said that investigators are always looking for ways to reach out to the community.

"We are constantly thinking about different things that we can do, different tools that we can use to try and get our crimes

solved. We can't do it alone, so we are always asking for the help from our community," she said. "That's because we are a group of eyes and ears, but our community is a long-reaching group of eyes and ears. We are trying to tap into every available resource, and with that came the thought that we probably should look at putting something out."

Investigators turned to the city's public relations and marketing department for assistance, which led to the production of the video.

"This tactic has turned out to be a great way to reach people on a more personal level in a way that is more solid, when we look at a project that needs to reach a certain group of people," said Eddie McNeal, the city's director of marketing and communications. "Somebody there knows what happened. Somebody there might be the killer. The video creation and trying to get this down so that everybody sees it is focused on one thing, and that's solving these murders."

While Thompson agrees that the unsolved murders are concentrated in one area, she said that crime happens everywhere.

"Crime can happen in any community, in any neighborhood and on any street. We have had in my 21 years of experience a homicide to happen in

THEIR KILLERS ARE AT LARGE

CHRISTOPHER JONES TYRAHN ELLIOTT CHRISTOPHER THOMPSON DELROY EAST

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every ward of the city. Crime is not specific to any one area; it could happen to everyone."

The veteran captain also said that the victims' families are aware of the new initiative and that the department is doing everything to solve the crimes.

"I think as a family member you don't care what type of new initiatives the police department will come up with to get the crime solved, you just want them to find who is respon-

sible for taking the lives of your loved ones and bring them to justice," she said. "We have four families out there who have lost a loved one, and to add insult to injury, there is nobody out there who is being held accountable. No one. It's difficult to have to bury someone for any reason."

That difficulty is intensified when you're burying someone who was killed at the hands of another person, but it's even worse when there is no one being

held accountable for it."

Like most low-income minority communities, the "no snitching" culture is rampant throughout the community where the homicides took place, meaning that even if residents saw or knew some information, they wouldn't say anything in an effort to protect others.

Thompson said that while it makes investigators' jobs harder, it doesn't make it impossible.

"We rely heavily on assistance and cooperation from the community. It's only so many of us, but we have citizens all over the city.

They are able to hear, in some cases, more than we are.

We need that information from them," she said. "So yes, that whole idea behind not snitching, sorta speak, on anyone or people in your neighborhood causes us some challenges.

I'm not going to say it prevents us from getting our jobs done, but certainly it doesn't help us. In every one of these cases, there is someone out there who

knows what happened, there is no question in our minds about that."

The video is taped at each location where the four bodies were found and includes a brief synopsis about the cases by investigators.

It was produced by WSTV and is posted on the city's Youtube channel.

Thompson is asking that anyone with information come forward.

"It's just getting that person to come forward and do the right thing and let us know who it is. I understand that people have to live in these communities.

That's why we have our Crimestoppers tip line available.

It's 100 percent anonymous," she said.

Crimestoppers is offering a cash reward for information that leads to an arrest and can be reached at 336-727-2800 or you can text BITEBACK to 274637.

A direct call can be made to the agency by calling 336-773-7700.

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