

# Little optimism in Eastern Iowa murder probes

By Gary Peterson  
Gazette staff writer

DES MOINES -- Optimism does not abound in the office of the director of Division of Criminal Investigation when the conversation turns to four recent Eastern Iowa homicides.

The double homicide discovered Sept. 13 at the Amana Holiday Inn ranks as one of the most perplexing for director Gerald Shanahan.

Rose Burkert, 22, and Roger Atkison, 32, both of St. Joseph, Mo., checked into the motel Sept. 12. Little else is known except that they were found dead Sept. 13, their skulls slashed and caved in by repeated blows. "They were crushing, sharp wounds," according to one source. It is believed either an ax or hatchet was used in the slayings.

"We're still looking for the big break" in that case, Shanahan said in an interview last week with The Gazette.

He noted there is a lot of physical evidence in the case, but declined to reveal what.

He termed the reported connection between this and a similar case last summer in Galesburg, Ill., in which a 25-



Rose Burkert



Roger Atkison



Sandra Pittman

year-old Peoria, Ill., man was killed similarly as "speculation."

Iowa County Sheriff Bill Spurrier has called the case the most perplexing in his 32 years of law enforcement.

Shanahan said as of last week three agents still were working on the case full-time. "We haven't exhausted the leads," he said with little optimism in his voice.

ON SEPT. 17, Shanahan's division found itself investigating yet another violent Eastern Iowa death, that of Sandra Pittman, 17, of Davenport. Her body was dumped at

a rest stop a mile west of Clarence on U.S. Highway 30.

Death was said to have been caused by a blow to the head, possibly by a claw hammer or crowbar.

Cedar County Sheriff Keith Whitlatch last week said the investigation is "at a dead end." Shanahan said leads still were being pursued but that he was not too optimistic about the outcome.

Miss Pittman was last seen the afternoon before at a Catholic Worker house in Davenport.

Shanahan said he was not at liberty to

say if either of these crimes were sex crimes.

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SHANAHAN WAS more optimistic in connection with the investigation of the Nov. 30 murder of Sue Belcher Forrest, 18, of Grinnell.

Her body was found in a ditch north of Mountour on a Tama County road. The body was partially concealed by brush.

Shanahan said his men have a motive in the case, where strangulation was ruled as the cause of death, but refused to elaborate.

Shanahan would not confirm reports that

the woman also had been stabbed. The woman had been seen in Marshalltown before her body was found. The Grinnell Herald Register quoted sources saying her body was nude from the waist down.

An Aug. 23 Marshalltown murder case also has authorities baffled, Shanahan said.

Susan K. Vickers, 30, was reported missing Aug. 22 when she failed to show up for work at the Iowa Veterans Home. Her body was discovered the next day in the Veterans Home cemetery by a maintenance worker.

Death was reported due to multiple blows to the head.

Shanahan said he held little hope for any quick solution to the case.

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SHANAHAN, a 25-year FBI agent before assuming his role with the DCI, acknowledged bewilderment in these cases, but was hasty to point out the division's homicide solution rate.

"Our clearance rate is above the national average, which is in the 70 percent range," he said.

In 1980 there have been 80 questionable

• Please turn to page 31A: Murders

The Gazette

## Metro-Iowa

Cedar Rapids/Sunday, Dec. 21, 1980

## Best time to sell school bonds still puzzling Postville

By Mark E. Bowden  
Gazette assistant state editor

POSTVILLE — The Postville school board is struggling with an economics problem that's hard to answer.

The board has permission to sell up to \$2.2 million in general obligation bonds for a high school addition, but inflation has pushed interest rates on the bonds nearly out of the district's financial reach.

Should the board wait and sell the bonds, if and when the interest rates decline, or should it sell the bonds at prevailing rates for fear that they'll never be lower?

Superintendent Richard Smith, in a telephone interview last week, said for the time being "we're just waiting for lower interest rates."

Smith said the board is acting on advice from Carleton D. Beh Co., a Des Moines firm that has been retained to sell the bonds.

Beh has recommended waiting another three or four months for a "positive change in the market," according to Rex Ramsey, a company consultant.

It's been nearly 18 months since district voters approved sale of the bonds. And the sale has been postponed twice on the advice of Beh because of high interest rates.

Originally, the district planned to sell the bonds when interest rates were between 6 percent and 7 percent, but now inflation has pushed to the rate to more than 10 percent.

"As interest rates increase, the bonds' purchasing power decreases," said Smith, who pointed out that because the district's indebtedness is limited by law, the increase in interest must be compensated by decreasing the principal of the loan.

Smith said that because of some cost-saving features of the project, he believes that if the district settles for an interest rate between 7 and 10 percent, the project comes "pretty close" to what was originally planned.

The issue received 63 percent approval (60 percent was necessary) when it was voted on in June 1979.

The bonds are to be sold to finance construction of a single-story addition to the Mott building. The addition would have 10 classrooms and a gymnasium.

The district uses two buildings for high school — Mott and a building called the junior building — and students have to go between them to attend some of their classes.

Also included in the project is demolition of the original junior building, renovation of the 1941 addition to the junior building and construction of outside athletic facilities for football, baseball and track.

"During that time, not many bond issues were passing. We thought it was real fine (63 percent approval); it was an indication of support," Smith said.

But as the school board considers selling some bonds to pay off architectural fees incurred on the project, concern has

• Please turn to Page 22A: Postville



Clark and Evelyn Ferguson of Vinton, like many Iowans struggling to make ends meet, will forego their traditional gift exchange with their families this year. "It hurts," they said, to be on the receiving end all the time.

## Hardships hurt worst during Yule season

"We've told the kids Santa isn't going to bring much this year," said the young mother of five. And a grandmother of 16 wept and said, "It hurts not to be able to give gifts to our grandkids."

By Gail Cooper-Evans  
Gazette Assistant Weekend Editor

GIVING GIFTS at Christmas is one of the pleasures of the season, especially when it comes to children. For many Iowa parents and grandparents, burdened with inflation, unemployment and the escalating cost of fuel, that pleasure will be denied them this year.

The number of Iowans drawing unemployment benefits for the week ending Dec. 6 was 39,540. It's a safe bet many of them are parents. Even grandparents among the 362,842 elderly drawing Social Security are having a tough time.

Goldene Weichman, supervisor of the Benton County Community Action Program, said it's not uncommon for her outreach workers to find people doing without necessities to pay their bills.

"We had three families living in their cars. Other people have moved in with relatives. We have one old lady who wasn't taking her heart medicine; she hadn't taken it for two or three months. Her doctor was panicky when we told him. Other people have been choosing between eating and heating. They'll do without food to pay the bills. One man even sold his pickup a month ago to pay his light bill."

Such examples are not isolated, Weichman believes, saying, "It's happening all over the state."

TO SAVE on expenses, two young unemployed families — 10 people — are sharing a two-bedroom trailer in Vinton. They've told their children not to expect toys from Santa.

"We've bought a couple of outfits for the kids — no toys — and some candy. Kids love candy," said one of the fathers, a welder by trade. He was laid off from the Hawk Bilt Co. in Vinton last August.

"Things could be worse," insists one of the mothers, 31-year-old Linda. That's not her real name; both of the couples preferred not to be identified. "At least we have a roof over our heads," she said.

Linda, her husband and their five children, aged from 3 months to 10 years, lived and worked in Utah until recently. They were residents in a hotel where her husband did maintenance work. "The economy" caused the hotel to close its doors, Linda said, putting 30 families, including hers, not only out of work, but out of a home, too.

Linda's family moved in with her sister-in-law's family.

• Please turn to Page 22A: Hardships

## Boyd steers U of I cautiously through choppy fiscal waters

Editor's note: Hard times have fallen upon the University of Iowa.

Gov. Robert Ray has ordered university officials to find ways to do without \$5.9 million of the \$129 million the U of I expected to receive from the state during the current school year. Consequently, the university has increased tuition, begun a hiring freeze and cut back on equipment purchases and building maintenance. But even with that, the U of I is still searching for ways to make ends meet.

The university's faculty and staff, still bitter over the state Board of Regents' inability to win more than a 7 percent pay hike during the last round of salary negotiations, are demanding pay hikes of 20 percent for the 1981-82 school year and 12 percent more the next year. Unless significant improvements in salaries are made, at least some faculty members plan to organize a collective bargaining unit to replace the regents as their representatives during salary negotiations.

Meanwhile, a coalition of theater students has formed a Theater Arts Student Union that has demanded changes in the curriculum and staffing of the U of I's Communications and Theater Arts department. The group recently decided its members will not enroll in classes to be taught by three department faculty members, including

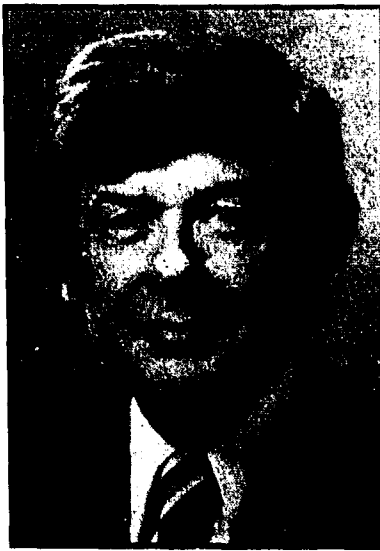
those taught by two tenured professors, on the grounds that their teaching skills are deficient. The union's leaders predict similar groups will soon be formed in the U of I's business, music and art schools.

The task of coping with these and other problems ultimately belongs to U of I President Willard Boyd, who discussed these and other issues facing Iowa's largest university with Tom Walsh, The Gazette's Johnson County Bureau chief. The interview was conducted during a break in Wednesday's state Board of Regents' meeting in Ames.

There's been so much in the public press about the negative impacts these funding cutbacks are having on University of Iowa programs. What do you tell a parent who, in effect, wonders why they should send their kids to Iowa? What positive things can be said about what you still have to offer?

"Well, I think we have a wonderful university, and that's what we are trying to hang onto. That's why we are being so staunch at this point. I think we have an excellent faculty and excellent programs. But all that could start coming unraveled, and I don't want it to come unraveled."

University of Iowa President Willard Boyd



But you're still having to put up with staff shortages and large classes, both of which hardly seem attractive to prospective students.

"That's right, but the point is all that will obviously adversely affect the programs. I think what we are seeing is the beginnings of that unraveling."

Is the university, at some point, going to have to cope with a cutback in faculty and staff? A 20 percent decrease in enrollment is projected over the next 10 years. Is this going to involve a 20 percent decrease in staff?

"We've never been able to meet the appropriate

• Please turn to Page 33A: Boyd

Pulled man from fiery wreck

## Hero upset 2 women couldn't be rescued

MARSHALLTOWN (AP) — A Cedar Rapids man who rescued one person from the burning wreckage of a two-car accident said Saturday he doesn't feel like a hero because he failed in an effort to rescue two others who burned to death in the crash.

"I'm not a hero," said Ron Daubenmier in a telephone interview. "I didn't get them all out. I only got one of them out."

Daubenmier, a truck driver, was driving his daily route between Cedar Rapids and Marshalltown Friday morning when he witnessed the two-car crash on U.S. Highway 30 two miles east of Marshalltown.

Killed in the crash were Kristi Wantz, 19, of rural Marshalltown and Mildred Olson, 63, of St. Petersburg, Fla.

Daubenmier pulled Mrs. Olson's husband, Willard, 66, from their burning station wagon. Olson was listed in very stable condition Saturday at a Marshalltown hospital.

The 38-year-old truck driver said

he went first to Wantz's vehicle but couldn't get near it because of the flames. He ran to the other vehicle, pulled out Olson and then went back to try to rescue Olson's wife.

"She was alive yet in there," said Daubenmier. "I could hear her, but I could never find her. . . . She was yelling like, 'Get me out.' She was definitely alive," he said.

"I didn't sleep at all last night." In a vain effort to locate the woman, Daubenmier said he dug through piles of grapefruit, oranges and other items that had been thrown into the front seat of the car as a result of the impact.

Smoke and heat from the burning wreckage eventually forced him to give up.

He said Olson was conscious and begged him to try to help his wife.

State troopers said Wantz apparently lost control and her car swerved into the path of the Olson car. The Wantz car then hit the guard rail of a bridge and burst into flames.

# New hope seen for Arthur School overpass

Chances appeared to be "slim and none" in October of getting a pedestrian overpass constructed over First Avenue East and 27th Street.

But now Cedar Rapids officials again see a ray of hope for the proposed project.

On Friday, Cedar Rapids again sent an application to the Iowa Department of Transportation, seeking a waiver of standards requiring the overpass to be made accessible to the handicapped. An earlier waiver application was denied by the state.

**EFFORTS HAVE** been made for more than five years to get a ramp built at the busy intersection. Mel Meyer, city traffic engineer, said the main purpose of the ramp is to get elementary school children safely across First Avenue on their way to and from Arthur School.

The city wants to build the overpass with stairs instead of ramps, which is contrary to state and federal accessibility laws, unless a waiver is granted.

Meyer pointed out in October that if the standards are complied with, the ramp would have to have a platform every 2½ feet to accommodate the handicapped. To reach the height the overpass must be to allow traffic under it, he said, the ramps on each side of the walkway would have to be about 245 feet long. Meyer says that's impractical and would also triple the cost of the overpass.

Wayne Murdock, city public improvements commissioner, said of the project, "All we are trying to do is to get away from building some monstrosity out there that we won't use."

In explaining his newfound optimism, Meyer said the city of Omaha recently obtained a waiver for a pedestrian overpass proposed with stairs instead of a ramp. It may be precedent-setting, Meyer said, adding, "Our chances (of getting a waiver) have improved significantly" because of it.

Meyer said the new waiver application includes letters of support for a stair overpass. The letters are from the Cedar Rapids School District, city building official Ed Winter and the city attorney.

Both the Cedar Rapids and Iowa Civil Rights Commissions have been



Dick Hogan  
Gazette City Hall reporter

asked to examine the plans and inform the city whether or not it would constitute any discriminatory practice.

In a letter of support, Aldrich Drahos, executive director of elementary education, said the school district provides transportation to all handicapped students if their handicap would make it difficult to attend their assigned school. He pointed out that all Arthur School area handicapped students are provided with transportation to and from school.

"I am hoping that the overpass on First Avenue and 27th Street will be available in the near future," Drahos' letter to Meyer said.

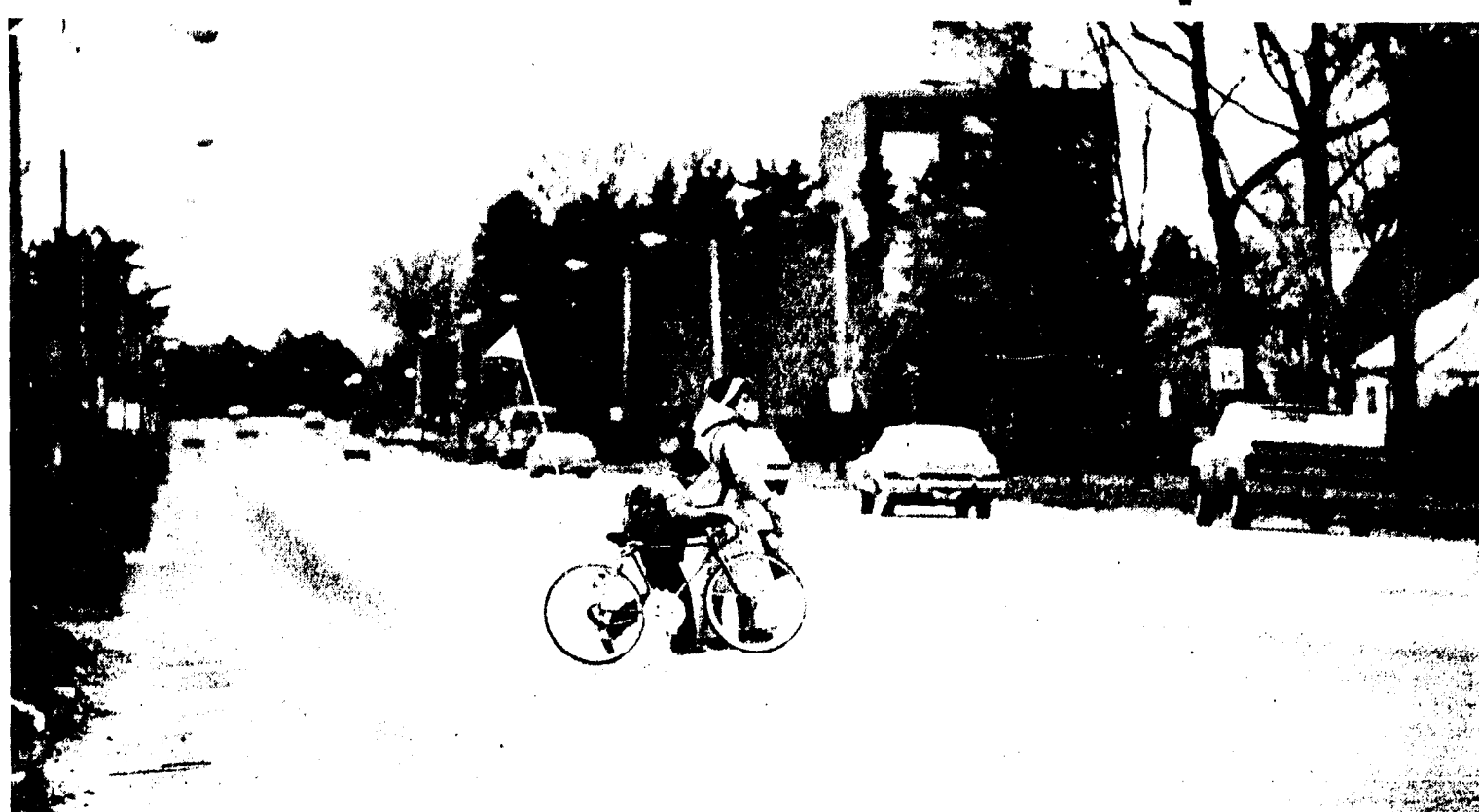
Ed Winter, city building official, wrote a letter to Meyer expressing the opinion that the structure as an overhead school crossing is justified as an acceptable, safe substitute to children being assisted across the street by adult crossing guards. Winter said the structure with stairs would be accessible to more than 99 percent of the general public wishing to cross First Avenue.

Further, Winter said, it's his opinion that none of the federal standards, state or local laws appear to require that the proposed overhead crossing be made accessible for the handicapped.

Meyer said if the overpass is constructed, the street crossing would remain for anyone wishing to use it. He noted, however, that IDOT has said it does not believe that a pedestrian crossing controlled by traffic signals is a viable alternative for the handicapped and aged persons who cannot negotiate the stairs of an overpass.

But armed with the Omaha waiver and the supporting letters referred to earlier, Meyer said he's more optimistic now about a waiver than he was in October. If IDOT does approve, then the recommendation must go to the Federal Highway Administration for its approval.

It would take from 30 to 90 days to find out if the waiver of standards will



Crossing guard Ann Walden helps an Arthur School student across First Avenue at 27th Street. Among the children she assists are two children of her own — Michelle, a 6th grader, and David, a 1st grader.

be granted. If it is, the design must be redrawn and the project put out for bids before construction can begin. If all goes well, Meyer would like the overpass to be ready by the beginning of next school year, although he says chances of that appear slim.

Federal funds for a pedestrian overpass at First Avenue East and 27th Street were approved last February, but cannot be used for the project unless the waiver is approved, or unless the city builds it to state and federal standards. Under the grant, federal funds would pay 75 percent of the construction costs and the city would pay the rest. Estimated cost for the ramp with stairs is \$150,000, but with the ramps it could exceed \$300,000.

hours on the cases "and this leads to exhaustion," and considerable marital tension, he added.

**SHANAHAN GAVE** a brief profile of an Iowa murder.

He said 31 percent involve family members, 25.4 percent a friend or acquaintance, 16.9 percent a stranger, 22.5 percent unknown, 1.4 percent a boy or girlfriend and about 2.8 percent an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend.

He said about 60 percent of the homicides involved the use of firearms and the remaining 40 percent involved knives, fists, feet and blunt instruments. The average victim is about 32 years old and the average offender is about 30 years old. Victims are about even by sex, while 75 percent of the offenders are male.

Shanahan said the agents are under constant scrutiny by the public and the media. "There are no Kojaks, no Barettas, Clint Eastwoods (Dirty Harry)," he said, noting the public expects cases to be solved in 60 minutes.

## From Page 21A: Murders



Gerald Shanahan, director of Iowa's Division of Criminal Investigation: "We only had 2.2 murders per 100,000 inhabitants last year compared with the national average of 9.7."

deaths in Iowa; many of these turned out to be suicides. However, the department determined that 37 were homicides.

"Only four or five of these homicides have not been cleared (including the aforementioned cases), as far as our department is concerned, through an arrest or by grand jury action," Shanahan said.

Shanahan said that Iowa's violent crime rate is much less than the rest of the nation. "We only had 2.2 murders per 100,000 inhabitants last year compared with the national average of 9.7."

Shanahan is concerned about the frustrations of these unsolved cases and what they do to his men involved in them.

In these investigations there is a sense of urgency, he said, and this tends "to turn a pro into a crusader . . . work becomes more important than anything else."

Often, he said, investigators are unable to shut off emotions and continue working many of their free

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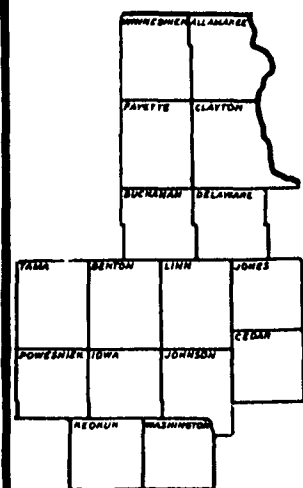
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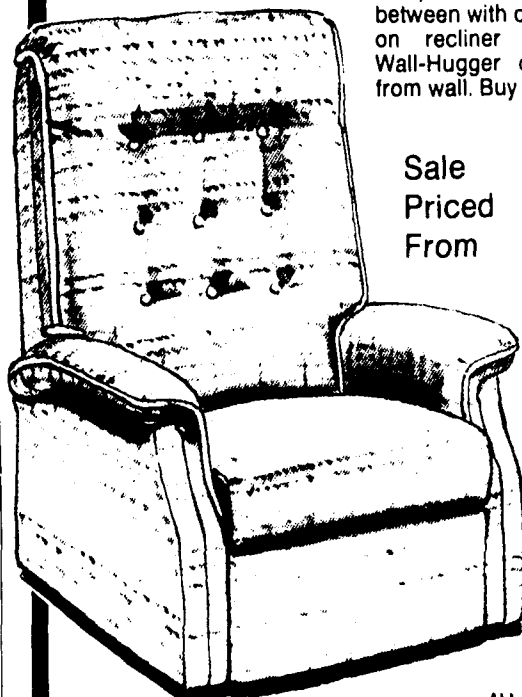


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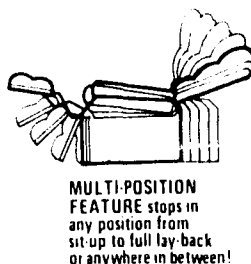
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