

ELLEN KURT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The body of Maria "Lisa" Peak, the Wartburg student who was the victim of a deadly assault while in college, was exhumed last week to try to recover evidence by retesting her remains with modern technology.

Peak was starting her sophomore year of college when she decided to go shopping on Sept. 6, 1976. When she didn't return, her roommate, and a student she was supposed to go on a date with that night, called Wartburg Security, who then called the police.

Mary Peak, Peak's mother, was cleaning her home when she got the news of her daughter's death.

"I immediately called the police and said, 'Why haven't you called me that she's missing?' And the man on the other end said, 'Well, we have a body.' And I knew it was hers," Peak said.

The sophomore was found north of Waverly one day after disappearing, unconscious and naked, Kasey Wadding, Bremer County District Attorney, said. Evidence proved that she was sexually assaulted and her neck was broken.

Students on the Wartburg campus were notified right away and residence hall meetings were held frequently to dispel any rumors, Kent Hawley, former Vice President for Student Affairs, said.

He said he and the Associate Dean encouraged all students to walk in groups of at least twos whenever they went anywhere.

"I think the students handled it very well, but this really had an impact on the whole community," Hawley said.

Around the time that this happened three other homicides had occurred but Wadding said Peak's case showed the most promise to be solved.

"All those cases are looked at from time to time; [the Peak case] has the most physical evidence and I don't want to say that that was great, but it was better than the others," Wadding said.

Mary Peak said she wants to give the case every chance it can to be solved, but she is not expecting the case to be solved based on this examination. DNA can last for a long time, and Wadding said with modern technology, it was worth re-evaluating the DNA.

"It is something that we thought should be done, just by virtue of the chance that there could still be something present," Wadding said.

Mary Peak said her daughter kept a diary in which she referred to her body as a shell and wrote about what she wanted done with her body after she died.

"She hoped it would just be in a wooden box so it would decay quickly and she could just turn into flowers and grass," Mary Peak said.