FBI offers to help investigate deaths

By Dan McCaleb
Staff Writer

The FBI has offered its assistance to local authorities investigating the deaths of three Lafayette women found dumped in separate rural locations recently.

Neil Edwards, senior supervisory agent at the FBI's Lafayette Office, said local authorities have been told they can have access to any investigatory tools or background information at the FBI's disposal to help them in their investigation of the unsolved murders.

"As far as we know, there are no federal violations involved in any of these cases, so we wouldn't become involved directly," Edwards said. "But in terms of the use of our computers or access to the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes, we would let them know we'll help them in any way we can."

Neil Edwards

New leads into the deaths of 30-year-old Sandra Cobb, 29-year-old Japparri Salters and 23-year-old Angela Lynn Martinez have been few and far between, authorities said.

Deputy Lafayette Coroners John Jacobson said further examination of Cobb's remains Friday turned up no new evidence. She was found by rabbit hunters Wednesday morning, badly decomposed, to the point where only her skeleton remained. X-rays of Cobb's skeleton Friday turned up no new evidence, Jacobson said. A cause of death still has not been determined, though it is being treated as a homicide. Further examination of Cobb was expected today, Jacobson said.

While there is no concrete evidence that the three cases are directly related, authorities are investigating that possibility. All three women were relatively young. All were found in secluded locations and all were believed to have died between late June and mid-September.

Salters' body was found in a culvert west of Scott Aug. 28. She was believed to have been killed less than 24 hours before she was found. Martinez' skeletal remains were found Oct. 1 in a levee in St. Landry Parish. She was believed to have been killed in late June.

Two of the three women -- Salters and Martinez -- suffered severe skull fractures. And at least two of the women -- Cobb and Salters -- have criminal histories. Salters has been arrested for simple battery and prostitution while Cobb has at least one theft conviction and several other theft arrests, according to court records.

Although Salters is the only one of the three victims with a prostitution arrest on her record, authorities are investigating the possibility that all three women had connections to Lafayette's prostitution circle, sources close to the probe said.

Officially, other law enforcement personnel say they have no evidence that Cobb and Martinez have any connection to prostitution.

"I'm not aware of anything like that," Lt. Mike Savoie of the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office said. Earlier in the week, Sgt. Nat Ewing of the Lafayette Police Department said he had no information that led authorities to believe Martinez had any connection to prostitution. Ewing was out of the office Friday and could not be reached for comment regarding Cobb's background.

Savoie said local authorities would welcome FBI assistance if it is deemed necessary. The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crimes may help authorities determine if there are any similarities between the three deaths here and murders in other parts of the country.

"Knock on wood that that's not the case, but if these three cases are connected and they are similar to a series of murders say in Florida or wherever, the national center could help us identify that," Edwards said.

If investigators find conclusive evidence that a single killer committed all three murders here, experts also could be provided by the FBI to draw up a personal profile of the suspected killer, authorities said.

At this point, however, everything is speculation.

"We just don't have a lot to go on right now," Savoie said.

Please see FBI, A-11