Hub City's murder rate among lowest in state for '94

By Dan McCabe
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After lingering near the top in the state the last two years in homicides per capita, the city of Lafayette's murder rate declined sharply in 1994 and appears to be among the lowest in Louisiana.

Seven murders were reported in the Hub City for all of last year, down from the 19 murders recorded in each of the two prior years, 1992 and 1993.

"I would think that compared to all the cities in Louisiana, Lafayette had one of the best per capita murder rates in the entire state," Sgt. Ned Ewing, public information officer for the Lafayette Police Department, said. "That's good news."

Based on the latest state figures available, the city of Lafayette had an estimated population of 106,915 at the beginning of 1994. Lafayette therefore averaged 6.7 murders per every 100,000 residents in 1994.

The FBI and other national law enforcement groups use the 100,000 residents statistic as a standard by which to compare one city's murder rate to another.

By comparison, New Orleans, with an estimated population of 493,021, recorded 420 murders in 1994, or 85.2 murders per 100,000 residents, according to FBI's national figures. Other city national figures have been released. New Orleans may yet be declared the murder capital of the United States, possibly having a higher murder rate per capita than any other city in the country. Last year, New Orleans finished second to Gary, Ind., for this dubious honor. But Gary reported a more than 30 percent drop in its murder rate in 1994, according to the Associated Press.

Baton Rouge, population 226,647, recorded 35 murders last year, or 28.7 per 100,000 residents. Here's how some other Louisiana cities stacked up in 1994:

- Alexandria (pop. 49,961), 10 murders, 20.2 per 100,000 residents;
- Monroe (pop. 55,571), 13 murders, 23.4 per 100,000 residents;
- New Iberia (pop. 32,702), 4 murders, 12.2 per 100,000 residents;
- Shreveport (pop. 206,049), 68 murders, 33.9 per 100,000 residents. Figures for Lake Charles were not available.

In 1992 and 1993, when Lafayette recorded 19 murders each year, the city's murder rate hovered at around 18.6 per 100,000 residents.

The city of Opelousas and a few other smaller cities in Louisiana recorded no murders in all of 1994. But for cities with a population of more than 30,000, Lafayette, with its 6.7 murders per 100,000 residents average, appears to be the state's low.

Breaking down Lafayette's murders by month, one was committed in February, one in May, two in June, one in August, and two in October. Five of the murders were shootings, one was a stabbing, and the seventh was a strangulation and beating.

Arrests have been made in all of the cases except the Aug. 28 shooting murder.

Murder

of 26-year-old Mark Thomas at his girlfriend's Willow Street home. Lafayette Crime Stoppers has offered a $1,000 reward for any information leading to the arrest and prosecution's acceptance of charges against the offender in the Thomas case. Anyone with information can call Crime Stoppers at 332-8477.

As for other types of crime in Lafayette, Ewing said statistics for the entire year will not be available until later this month. He said it appears that overall crime will be up by about 5 percent in the city, based on statistics through the first 11 months of the year. But those statistics also include crimes that occurred in the estimated 10 square miles of property annexed into the city in June. The annexation will inflate 1994's crime statistics when comparing the numbers to previous years, Ewing said.

"It very well could be that the estimated 5 percent increase is just a result of including crimes from the annexed area in the city's total," Ewing said. "How we can compensate for that to get a more pure comparison, I don't know."