Lafayette's murder rate showing sharp increase over last year

Other violent crimes up as well

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LAFAYETTE — Based on third-quarter crime figures, the number of murders in Lafayette Parish in 1997 will be double that of the 1996 tally by year's end.

The information, provided by both the Lafayette Police Department and the Lafayette Parish Sheriff Office's shows there were 14 homicides in the parish through September. Three of those murders were handled by the sheriff's office; the remainder were recorded by the LPD.

Extrapolating that figure based on an average of 1.5 homicides per month, the total number of homicides by the end of the year will be 18. In 1996, the parish and city combined recorded nine homicides. According to the Lafayette Areawide Planning Commission, the city of Lafayette's population (112,543 in 1997) has increased an average of 2 percent annually since 1990. The parish's population (182,799) increased 1.4 percent.

The projected murder rate for 1997, on the other hand, is up 100 percent over last year. But comparing the parish's projected murder rate to the national average shows a local rate only slightly higher than that experienced nationwide.

According to the Uniform Crime Report for 1997, the FBI's annual report that was released in September, the national average for murders in 1996 (the last year available) was 7.4 homicides per 100,000 people. With a parish population at nearly 183,000, Lafayette's projected murder rate for this year is 9.8 homicides per 100,000 people.

It should be noted that, according to the UCR for 1997, the southern region of the United States has the highest homicide rate of any region in the country (43 percent of all murders reported). Moreover, Louisiana has the highest murder rate of the southern states. The Statistical Abstract of the United States identifies Louisiana's murder rate as 19.8 per 100,000 people — significantly higher than the local rate.

Compared with the District of Columbia, which recorded 70 homicides per 100,000 people last year, the state average is low.

Other violent crimes through three quarters are also showing a parishwide increase over last year.

Robberies and assaults showed negligible increases over 1996 through three quarters. Robberies were up 3 percent, from 203 in 1996 to 209 in 1997. Assaults rose 9 percent, from 3,119 in 1996 to 3,390 in 1997.

The number of rapes, however, has increased 32 percent, from 72 through three quarters of 1996 to 96 through three quarters of this year.