

## Project's PIs give families hope

PAXTON— In the past, when the investigation into a murder or missing person case turned cold, families had few options. But since the Molly Bish Center for the Protection of Children and Elderly was established two years ago at Anna Maria College, it has been providing families with something very important: hope — and private investigators who work on their unsolved cases for free.

Molly's father, John J. Bish, and his longtime friend, Thomas P. Shamshak, who retired as police chief from both Spencer and Winthrop, came up with the idea for the center. When 16-year-old Molly disappeared in 2000, Mr. Shamshak had already been a private investigator for a year. He called Mr. Bish, a friend for more than 10 years, and offered his services pro bono. Molly's remains were found in 2003 on the highest point of a ridge called Whiskey Hill in woods bordering Warren and Palmer.

"John and I, literally at his kitchen table after walking up Whiskey Hill, hatched this plan to train PIs to do pro bono work on behalf of these families," said Mr. Shamshak, who is still working the case.

The Molly Bish Center, which was unveiled in April 2004, put together a one-day seminar in November 2004 for private investigators, retired former state investigators, and retired personnel from the FBI. It was hosted by Mr. Bish and Mr. Shamshak.

"We started a training curriculum that acquainted PIs with cold-case investigation," Mr. Shamshak said, referring to work done during the seminar.

"In total, we had 40 investigators from four of the New England states. We assembled speakers, we had people from the media. John talked about the process personally. There wasn't a dry eye in the room."

Those who attended the seminar "were people who have had experience with homicide and cold case investigation," Mr. Shamshak said. "We put the training program together and people came. In addition to the PIs, we brought a half-dozen families. At the conclusion of the event, over lunch, the families were introduced to the PIs and we paired up the families, which came from all over the state, with PIs."

The family of Patricia Ann Gonyea, whose murder in October 1984 in Worcester has been unsolved for 22 years, was matched up with Beverly Gravison of Assure Investigation of Worcester.

Mrs. Gravison said that when she met the Gonyea family, the hurt and looks of desperation struck a chord within her heart.

“You hate to pull the mother card, but that’s basically what it is.... I wish there were more hours in the day,” she said. “I am still in very close contact with the family. I feel like I know (Patricia) myself.”

The work of Assure Investigation on behalf of the Gonyea family does not end with Mrs. Gravison. “I’ve got two other detectives that also work for me,” she said. “They’re also doing work on the Gonyea case pro bono.”

As a mother, she said, she thinks highly of the Molly Bish Center for the help it provides these families.

“It’s invaluable,” she said. “That is their last hope. When you walk in and see them, they have a look of desperation. They want an end. They want to put the person to rest. They want justice.”

The Molly Bish Center has developed a pool of investigators working on cold cases in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. They get technical assistance from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Mr. Shamshak, through his relationship with the Bishes, took training for retired police officers provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, based in Alexandria, Va., and he encourages other retired officers to do the same.

“The national center has a volunteer component that works primarily on cold cases, called Project ALERT (America’s Law Enforcement Retiree Team),” said Mr. Shamshak, who is now public safety consultant to the Molly Bish Foundation.

The ALERT program has made a dent in the investigation of cold cases by identifying retired police officers to work in their geographical areas with police.

Another contributor to the work is STALK Inc., which stands for System To Apprehend Lethal Killers. According to its Web site, [www.stalkinc.com](http://www.stalkinc.com), the organization “is a profiling team of professionals whose mission is to aid law enforcement in the apprehension of serial killers through a comprehensive profiling process.”

John Kelly of STALK Inc. said, “From 1986 to 1993, the numbers of reported child abuse (incidents) went from 143,000 to 170,000, and in 2000 those numbers almost quadrupled to 879,000 reported incidents. Not everybody that gets abused will become a serial killer or a violent sex offender. However, it seems that every serial killer and violent sex offender was abused as a child.”

Considering those numbers, he said, he would expect the violence against children to continue, not decline.

With respect to the Molly Bish case, Mr. Shamshak said investigators have a considerable amount of evidence, but are missing key information that will solve the case.

Given that Molly’s mother saw a suspicious man in the Comins Pond parking lot the day before Molly’s disappearance, and that the window of opportunity for Molly to be kidnapped has been narrowed by police to two to three minutes, Mr. Shamshak said, he is convinced Molly walked onto the beach and into a well-planned trap.

“I don’t think this was chance or opportunistic,” he said. “All the evidence points to a well-orchestrated effort to get her off the beach and away from Comins Pond as quickly as possible. Whether she was taken directly to that hillside where her remains were eventually found or somewhere else first, I don’t know.”

He added, “As long as the Bishes keep Molly’s story before the public, and as long as law enforcement continues its work, this is a case that I believe eventually will be solved.”

Mr. Bish knows personally the kind of help the Molly Bish Center provides and what it means to the family of a child whose murder or disappearance remains unsolved. “We were between hope and desperation,” he said. “When you have a private investigator offering his work pro bono, it’s inspiring. It provides hope, which is so important.”

“That resolution helped bring peace to my family,” he added. “As a father, restoring peace was very important to me.”

*Telegram & Gazette staff reporter Bradford L. Miner contributed to this report.*

*By Jorge Bannister  
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