

McDowell Mountain News



Leviticus Nichols, 10 months old, came from Glendale to check out OdySea in the Desert.

The News Around Our Neighborhood

Mailed to homes in the Frank Lloyd Wright corridor and communities in the shadows of the McDowells.

Waste Management Phoenix Open treads new turf

By Greg Macafee



ASU alumnus Phil Mickelson has won the Waste Management Phoenix Open three times. (Photos special to Nearby News)

The Grand Canyon isn't the only famous hole in Arizona. Every winter, a certain hole in Scottsdale gets surrounded by tens of thousands of screaming people who drink beer and loudly boo and cheer on the cue of giant LED lights telling them to "Make Some Noise." Sometimes they get flipped off by professional athletes. Sometimes they make it rain plastic cups, like they did 20 years ago when an upstart named Tiger Woods took a 9-iron out of his bag and hit a hole-in-one.

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Scottsdale PD's DNA unit receives boost from national grant

By Jimmy Magahern



Kris Cano, forensic laboratory manager for Scottsdale PD's Crime Laboratory. (Photo courtesy Scottsdale Police Department)

First of all, Kris Cano would like to make it known that in real life, a forensic investigator can't get DNA "fast tracked" through the lab and have the results of the testing back in 15 minutes, like the characters can on CSI.

"It's not like you see on TV," said Cano, forensic laboratory manager for the Scottsdale Police Department's Crime Laboratory, located in the shadow of the Big Surf waterpark by Rio Salado Park. "We can't turn around a sample the same day that we

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collect it and give you the results and tell you who the DNA is from. There's a lot of steps, there's a lot of quality assurance steps in there to make sure what we do is accurate. So it's really nothing like it is on TV."

That said, the Scottsdale PD's crime lab is about to get a whole lot faster, thanks to a \$150,000 grant it was recently awarded from the National Institute of Justice to assist in handling the rise in DNA cases. Called the DNA Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction grant, the funds will be used by Cano's team to purchase additional software for the statistical evaluation of DNA evidence, purchase validation services to validate the results and to develop more effective methods to determine the quantity present in DNA samples, which is a required step in the DNA analysis process.

Speeding up the DNA unit's work became necessary thanks largely to the passage of House Bill 2268, which Gov. Doug Ducey signed last March. Under the new law, health care facilities must notify law enforcement within 24 hours of collecting a sexual assault forensic evidence kit, commonly referred to as a rape kit. Once notified, law enforcement agencies have five business days to take possession of the evidence, which then must be submitted to a crime lab within 15 days.

The bill was designed to address the problem of hundreds of thousands of rape kits sitting untested in police storage facilities across the country, which had impacted the Scottsdale PD as well. In 2016, there were 211 total cases involving DNA analysis (for crimes ranging from homicide and sexual assault to "property crimes," such as burglaries) backlogged at the end of the year, up 44 percent from the backlog of 147 in 2015. Cano estimates that backlog is at about 365 cases right now.

Speeding up the process of evaluating and validating DNA

evidence will allow the Scottsdale PD's crime lab to make sure every rape kit gets processed in a timely manner while allowing the team to also push through the other DNA cases. Cano says her lab currently has the smallest staff of any other full-service crime lab in the Valley — just three trained examiners, with another in training and a fifth position looking to be filled. Even so, they've been managing to process every sexual assault case as it comes in, turning them around within 60 days of receipt.

"We currently do not have any sexual assault cases that are backlogged," Cano said. What does get backlogged are the property crime DNA investigations, which Cano hopes the new software and services will help process faster.

"The process for every case is quite involved," she said. "The first step is always to examine the evidence and determine if there are any biological fluids present. Then we sample the evidence for DNA, and the next process is called extraction, where we take a small portion of that and we allow the DNA to be released from the cellular material. Then after it's extracted, we do a step called quantitation, where we determine how much DNA is present in the sample. From there we amplify it, or make many, many copies of DNA fragment, then we run them on an instrument and do a comparison of the crime scene samples to the known reference samples. Finally, we do statistical analysis, generate a report and do a review process. So all of those steps require about a week to do the actual laboratory process and probably another week to do the reporting in the review process."

Even with the new equipment, Cano's team still won't be up to CSI speed. But she's okay with that.

"I think this is exciting, just the variety of the work we'll be able to get done," she said. "And all the cases we'll be able to solve in less time." 🏠



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