

# Residents wary of talking to police

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Her husband won a lot of money that night, and her husband's killer also robbed him of his winnings, Barbara Foster said.

"I was hysterical when it happened. I didn't know what was going on. I looked out another window and saw a male running across my yard. I raised my window up. I said 'I see you,'" she said.

Barbara Foster asked police and her nearby uncle to go into the front yard to look for Kevin — Barbara was too afraid to go out.

"I can't rest knowing my husband was coming home to be with his family and was killed in his own yard," she said.

Barbara Foster believes she knows who murdered her husband, and she said more than one person was involved. She has already told Ruston police everything she and others know, she said.

"A lot of people tell me stuff that they hear, but they say 'It's just between me and you, because I won't talk to the police,'" Foster said.

The crime rate has increased in her community because of the recession, the city's population growth and drugs, Foster said. She believes that the police officer investigating her husband's murder wants to solve the case. She also believes, however, that street cops talk down to residents in her community.

"They degrade. It's like you are below them. It's because we're black or maybe low class. It's sad that people around here don't trust the police, because you have to have faith in the law," Foster said.

## 'People assumed he was snitching'

Patrice Goldsmith is per-

sonally connected to both murders.

Kevin Foster was her nephew, and Christopher Tillman was her brother.

She and her mother, Delories Pruitt, said they fear for their lives.

"I've already told the police that if someone messes with me, then I'm going to drop them and I'm going to sit right here and wait for (the police) to show up. That's because (the police) don't seem to be worried about what's going on out here," Pruitt said.

Tillman feared for his safety during the final two weeks of his life, Goldsmith said.

He served 10 years in prison for drug offenses and tried to adjust to free society, Pruitt and Goldsmith said. Someone killed him less than a year after his release.

"I told him that the people that he was friends with when he left here are not the same. They got a whole lot worse. I think he tried to be friends with people who had changed too much," Pruitt said.

She and her daughter know who killed Tillman, they said. Those people killed Tillman because they believed he became an informant for police, especially after his arrest last November on marijuana charges.

"He told me two weeks before he died that his life had been threatened, and he told me who had threatened him," Pruitt said.

Tillman told his mother that he was not an informant for the police, she said.

"He bonded out, and people assumed he was snitching," Pruitt said.

Tillman was working three respectable jobs when he died, she said.

"The people who did this

are still in Ruston and just as comfortable as can be, waving, laughing, everything. They run around with an attitude to let us know that they're comfortable. It's a way to let everyone know that they've gained power," Goldsmith said.

As is the case with Foster, people approach Pruitt to tell her information about her son's killers.

"One lady came here and told me something. I reported it to the police. She later denied saying it," Pruitt said.

Goldsmith said an arrest will give her and her mother a sense of closure.

"But, more than anything, we're afraid that this is already a cold case," Goldsmith said.

## Ruston police respond

Ruston Police Chief Steve Rogers said he will not talk about the two murders.

"I will only say that we are following up every possible lead. These are not forgotten cases. We are working hard to solve them. We are hoping that our actions build trust with the community, and we won't give up until we solve the cases," Rogers said.

Lt. Curtis Hawkins, spokesman for the Ruston Police Department, said investigators are actively working the cases. People who work at state crime labs haven't forgotten about the physical evidence that investigators collected at both crime scenes. Gathering enough evidence to solve a murder takes time, and real life investigators rarely catch a criminal in an hour or less, as they do on the television show *CSI*, Hawkins said.

"There is still a lot of pa-

perwork and processing work at the crime labs. Some of the stuff is months backlogged, even for homicides.

"These workers are understaffed and have too much work," Hawkins said.

"Even when we get information back, then we can't release it until we get an arrest. If I let something out and it helps the bad guy, then we've done everybody a disservice."

Anyone who knows anything about either crime and fears for their safety may anonymously report information through the department's Crime Stoppers hotline, 255-1111, he said. The police department will give a \$2,000 reward if information leads to an arrest and a conviction, he said.

## A lack of trust

Elmore Mayfield, the Ruston city councilman who represents the area where both murder victims lived, said people in his district don't trust police to offer the anonymity that they need when they report information.

"People have told me that they've called the police about both serious and minor crimes, and they told me that they later received threats from the people they complained about. The police give the identity of the person who made the complaint to the people accused," Mayfield said.

"The drug dealers and us-

ers seem to have more information and power than me. The street sellers don't seem to have very much fear," Mayfield said.

Mayfield has discussed the matter with Rogers, and he believes Rogers does take his concerns seriously, he said.

"Until I feel that my people are safe, I would feel guilty asking them to put themselves in jeopardy if they are not awarded with anonymity.

"I will ask them to proceed with caution," Mayfield said.



Mayfield