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thespec.com

March 5, 2007 Monday
Final Edition

A high-risk lifestyle

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SECTION: LOCAL; Pg. A09

LENGTH: 546 words

DATELINE: VINELAND

The discovery of a woman's body near Ball's Falls Conservation Area yesterday is shockingly similar to another discovery eight years ago at almost exactly the same spot.

On May 8, 1999, two cyclists found the near-naked body of Nadine Gurczenski in the ditch along Victoria Avenue, near Eighth Avenue, south of Vineland. The 26-year-old Toronto mother of two had a broken neck.

An autopsy showed she had also suffered internal injuries before her death.

Gurczenski had moved to Canada from Jamaica in 1992 and settled in St. Catharines with her husband, moving to Toronto when her marriage ended.

She worked as an exotic dancer at Marilyn's, a Mississauga strip club on Britannia Road East, near Dixie, under the stage name Sammy.

Her death is one of five homicides that spurred Niagara police to form a special homicide task force last January.

Diane Christina Dimitri, a 28-year-old Niagara Falls sex trade worker, was found dumped in a ditch at Darby Road and Grassybrook Road near the Niagara Falls city limit. Her body was found Aug. 9, 2003.

On Dec. 10, 2005, Cassey Joyce Cichocki, a 22-year-old crack-addicted exotic dancer, went missing. Her body, was found by a man walking along a hydro-right-of-way near Whirlpool Road and Church's Lane, only blocks where she'd worked as a dancer, on Jan. 24, 2006.

Cichocki's body, wrapped in a blanket, was found in some low bushes in an area strewn with garbage and debris.

Michael Durant, 33, a labourer who lived in a vacant store on Queen Street in Niagara Falls, was charged June 5, 2006, with the murders of both Cichocki and Dimitri.

The body of another Niagara Falls woman, 26-year-old Margaret Jeannette Jugaru, was found kneeling in an elementary school parking lot on Culp Street in Niagara Falls on July 9, 2004.

The special task force is also investigating the death of another sex trade worker who went missing in 1995.

The body of Dawn Stewart, a 31-year-old mother of two boys who was pregnant when she disappeared, was found on March 31, 1996, in a wooded area near Centre Street in Pelham.

All five women had suffered some form of trauma.

The Niagara task force has met with detectives from a now-defunct Hamilton task force into the disappearance and deaths of three women linked to high-risk street life and a dozen other attacks on Hamilton-area sex trade workers.

Project Advocate, which was disbanded in 2003, investigated the disappearances of Susan Gourley, 39, in November 2001, and Felicia Floriani, 15, in September 2002.

In August 2002, the badly beaten body of Kimlyn Judy Tolgyes, the 19-year-old Hamilton prostitute and mother of a three-year-old daughter, was found in Burlington's Kerncliff Park.

Project Advocate also investigated about a dozen other attacks on sex workers in the Hamilton area. Two men were charged in three of the incidents. All the other cases remain unsolved.

On Jan. 7 this year, the body of 35-year-old Cynthia Watson was found in a wooded area off Powerline Road in Copetown. The Hamilton mother of a seven-year boy had been working as an exotic dancer in a Brantford strip club.

Watson's autopsy did not reveal a cause of death and police are still waiting for toxicology tests to determine whether or not she had been killed before being dumped in the woods.

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LOAD-DATE: March 5, 2007

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: Photo: Canadian Press File Photo , The Niagara police set up a special homicide task force to investigate the murders of Diane Dimitri, from left, Nadine Gurczenski, Dawn Stewart, Margaret Jugaru and Cassey Cichocki.

DOCUMENT-TYPE: News

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper