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## Suspect arrested in Billy Ponder murder

By TIA LYONS and JOHN WORTHEN News-T imes Staff

A small crowd gathered Monday in the Council Chamber of City Hall in anticipation of a major announcement regarding the high-profile murder of an El Dorado businessman that occurred nearly 16 years ago and had since remained unsolved.

El Dorado Police Chief Ricky Roberts said DNA evidence has linked a former El Dorado resident to the April 28, 1992, murder of Billy Ponder, who was stabbed to death in a flower shop he owned on North West Avenue.

Family members, friends and those familiar with and interested in the case filed into City Hall to hear the news that a warrant for capital murder was served last week to James Edward Clemons in Wasau, Wis.

Roberts said Clemons was identified as a suspect as a result of a DNA sample that was re-submitted to the State Crime Lab in Little Rock two years ago by Lt. Jim Wade, of the El Dorado Police Department.

The police chief said he and investigator Sgt.

Jamie Morrow traveled to Wisconsin last Tuesday to interview Clemons, who was located with the assistance of the Marathon County (Wis.) Sheriff's Office, and Clemons made incriminating statements regarding the investigation into the Ponder murder.

Roberts said Clemons is being held in a Marathon County criminal detention facility and is scheduled for an extradition hearing there within the next two weeks.

"Once the extradition papers have been signed, we're going to send some of our officers to get him and bring him back here. I spoke to (13 th Judicial District Prosecutor) Robin Carroll on Friday and he's aware of what we've done and how we got to this point,"

Roberts said.

Roberts said the investigation remains open, and he would not comment on statements Clemons made or the DNA evidence connecting him to the crime.

Roberts said he was also reluctant to discuss a possible motive for the crime, but he acknowledged that Clemons lived in El Dorado at one time and knew Ponder at the time of the murder.

"He's saying that he left town the day after (Ponder's murder) and he has only been back to visit," Roberts said, adding that Clemons has family in El Dorado.

He said Clemons worked as a stock supervisor in a grocery store in Wisconsin and has a lengthy criminal history, having served time in Departments of Corrections in both Arkansas and Wisconsin.

Roberts said Clemons was "not on the radar" as a suspect in the murder of Billy Ponder until the EPD got a match with a comparison in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) DNA Profile.

Roberts said the EPD worked over the years to solve the case, as it does with all unsolved homicides, and he thanked officers, past and present, who have worked on the case.

Roberts and Wade told the News-T imes in 2006 that DNA evidence could possibly provide a break in the Ponder case.

Wade said then that DNA technology was not widely available to law enforcement in 1992, and he hoped that advancements in the crimefighting tool would help the EPD develop or confirm a suspect.

Since 1992, Ponder's murder has offered far more questions than answers.

Many throughout the El Dorado community were left wondering how someone could be slain in broad daylight in a shop on North West Avenue.

No witnesses ever came forward, and clues seemed scarce.

Robbery didn't seem to be a likely motive, considering the brutality of the killing, according to police information at the time of the murder. Although police didn't release the number of times Ponder was stabbed, they did say that his murderer acted "with a great deal of anger or emotion."

In the weeks and months following the brutal murder, the EPD sought help from the Federal Bureau of Investigations personnel, who eventually created a profile of the suspected killer. FBI officials told the EPD that evidence suggested the offender was male, and that the murder "was a personal attack not done for monetary reasons."

Ponder's body was found by his wife, Becky.

She'd been expecting him home after work that day, and she tried to phone him several times but there was no answer.

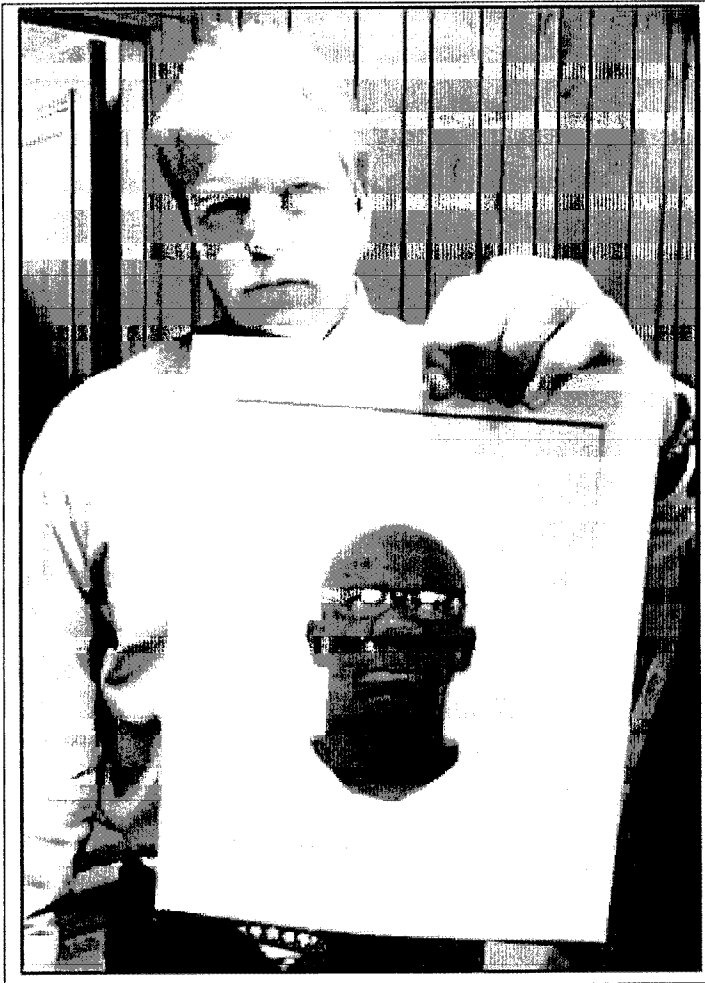
Becky Ponder then reportedly drove to her husband's shop, Billy Ponder's Flowers at 1302 N. West Ave., and found him lying on the floor covered in blood, according to police reports at the time of the murder.

When police arrived at approximately 7:21 p.m., they found Becky Ponder screaming hysterically.

In the years after Ponder's murder, rewards were offered and a psychic was consulted.

The psychic's information had nothing to do with Clemons, Roberts confirmed Monday.





News-Times/Larry Singer DNA links suspect to killing El Dorado Police Chief Ricky Roberts shows a picture of a suspect in a 16-year-old murder case. Roberts announced at a press conference Monday that a man from Wisconsin has been arrested in connection with the homicide of Billy Ponder of El Dorado.