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FBI search Shelton for Waterbury man

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SHELTON — About a dozen law-enforcement officials aided by the FBI and cadaver-sniffing dogs scoured several locations around the city Monday in the search for a missing Waterbury man believed to be the victim of foul play.

William "Billy" Smolinski, 31, was last seen the afternoon of Aug. 24, 2004, when he asked his neighbor to take care of his dog, Harley, because he planned to be gone for several days.

Smolinski, who is 6 feet tall and 200 pounds, with light brown hair and blue eyes, hasn't been heard from since, despite pleas from his family for information in the case. Dozens of missing-person posters have been put up in the Waterbury area, and a \$15,000 reward has been offered for information leading to a resolution in the case.

The yards of some newer homes on Edgewood and Fort Hill avenues were searched Monday, as well as an area underneath the Route 8 overpass near Wharf Street, across from the city's skateboard park, said Shelton police spokesman Capt. Michael Madden.

Waterbury police and representatives from the state's attorney's office as well as local police detectives were also involved in Monday's search, Madden said.

Waterbury police called in the FBI in August 2006, said Lt. Chris Corbett, Waterbury police spokesman.

"At that point, we had exhausted leads and felt the case could be revitalized with the FBI's help," he said. "They have more power, more authority and more resources than we do. Plus, it appeared this case was becoming multi-jurisdictional."

Recently, information was posted on a Web site, The Cool Justice Report, that claimed an informant told Waterbury police that Smolinski was murdered in a Woodbridge apartment and buried under concrete in a Shelton development.

"We haven't ruled out anything, and anything is possible," said Corbett, who admitted his department investigates all leads, no matter how outlandish they might seem.

Corbett wouldn't say specifically what led them to Shelton Monday.

"It was from some information that was developed during the investigation that we felt was credible," he said.

Mary Beth Miklos, an FBI spokeswoman, would not discuss details of the information provided to authorities, except to say, "We were in Shelton following up this lead, like we follow up on all leads."

While several properties were searched, Corbett said, a home at Fort Hill Avenue and Geissler Drive received the most attention, with police even digging a hole along the side of the house.

He declined, however, to give further details.

Earlier in the day, the usually quiet Edgewood Avenue neighborhood was shaken when police arrived on the scene, cordoned off the street, and began searching the yards of several homes built on a cul-de-sac during the summer of 2004.

Mark Torre's home was one of them.

"We had a police officer and detective at our front door first thing this morning," he said. "They asked if we would mind signing a paper giving them permission to check our property, and I said it was OK."

Frank Trcka, who has lived on Edgewood Avenue for 55 years, said he's never seen anything like it.

"There were about a dozen police and FBI with dogs," he said. "You don't see that every day."

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Trcka said he watched as the new homes were being built on his street, adding the home built next to his required a lot of fill in the back.

"They also had trouble pouring the foundation and poured it twice to make a higher foundation," he said. The backyard on that house also needed to be filled in because it sloped, he said.

"But I didn't see anything strange or unusual — nothing suspicious going on," he said. Madden said he wasn't sure when, or if, the other agencies would be returning to the city.

Smolinski has been listed as an "endangered missing person."

He apparently left his car keys and wallet in his truck, and there have been no withdrawals made from his bank account since he disappeared.

Relatives and friends said he took very good care of his dog and would never have left Harley alone.

Smolinski just bought a home of his own before he vanished and was very excited to get it painted that summer, according to information on a Web site dedicated to finding him.

He also apparently ended a relationship with a Woodbridge woman shortly before he disappeared.

Anne M. Amato, Naugatuck Valley bureau chief, can be reached at 736-5440.

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