

4 years into case, police scour truck for clues

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By Michelle Tuccitto Sullo, Naugatuck Valley Bureau Chief

Investigators did a forensic analysis Tuesday of the truck that belonged to missing Waterbury man William Smolinski Jr., looking for clues to his disappearance more than four years ago.

The state police Major Crime Squad did the work on the vehicle at Shelton police headquarters.

Shelton police Detective Ben Trabka said Tuesday that it was the first time the vehicle has been processed for possible evidence.

“Based on the information we have been getting, police felt it was appropriate to process it, to see if there is any evidence related to his disappearance,” Trabka said.

Smolinski, who went by the nickname “Billy,” was 31 years old and worked as an apprentice heating and air-conditioning technician and a part-time tow truck driver when he disappeared Aug. 24, 2004.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Smolinski asked a neighbor to watch his dog for a few days and indicated he was going to look at a car he was interested in buying. However, Smolinski’s white Ford pickup truck was found parked outside his Waterbury home. He had left behind his wallet and keys, according to the FBI.

His parents, William and Janice Smolinski of Cheshire, have said that the truck wasn’t found where their son typically parked it.

“Based on that and recent interviews, police thought it was appropriate to examine it,” Trabka said. “Investigators are looking for potential evidence like fingerprints, hair, DNA and fibers.”

The Smolinski family has kept the truck stored in the years since the disappearance. It was expected to take several hours for investigators to comb the vehicle Tuesday. They were doing an inventory of all the items inside it, and dusting for fingerprints. Analysis of any evidence collected could take weeks.

Lt. J. Paul Vance, a spokesman for the state police, said Tuesday he had no comment because it is an open case.

Janice Smolinski said the family kept the truck in storage because they “felt the truck may have been involved in the crime, but the police ignored our concerns at that time.”

“It took four years to reach the point we are at right now, with constant work to keep Billy’s name out of the cold case files,” she said.

There has been an increased level of activity in the case recently.

The FBI has confirmed investigators searched a home at 5 Nichols St. in Seymour in September. No one who lives there currently is connected to the case, according to police.

Police also have been pursuing tips that an acquaintance, Shaun Karpiuk, who was a construction worker, may have been involved in Smolinski’s disappearance.

Karpiuk, who was 27 when he died in 2005, and his family once lived at 5 Nichols St., according to police.

Karpiuk’s mother, Madeleine Gleason of Woodbridge, who had worked with and dated Smolinski, has a 2006 lawsuit pending against Smolinski family members in Superior Court in New Haven, claiming defamation. The lawsuit claims the defendants have falsely accused Gleason of involvement.

Attorney John Williams, who represents Gleason, said the fruitless searches to date “suggests the accusations are false, which they are.”

“There is no evidence against any of these people,” he said, referring to Gleason and Karpiuk.

Police in August searched a field on Bungay Road in Seymour for Smolinski. Previously, there were searches in Shelton, but Smolinski’s body has not been found.

“Police are following up on all leads,” Trabka said.

To give a tip in the Smolinski case by phone, call state police in Bethany at (203) 393-4200. Tips can be sent confidentially from a personal electronic device by texting “TIP711” plus the message to CRIMES, or 274637.

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