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Rocky River student is slain at Toledo U.

By MICHAEL K. MCINTYRE and MICHAEL O'MALLEY
PLAIN DEALER REPORTERS



MELISSA ANN HERSTRUM: Mystery phone call led authorities to her body.

TOLEDO

A nursing student from Rocky River was found shot to death at the University of Toledo yesterday.

Melissa Ann Herstrum, 19, was found face-down in the snow outside an engineering building on the university's Scott Park campus. She had multiple gunshot wounds, including one to the head, said Toledo police spokesman Sgt. Art Marx.

"We are surmising the victim had been shot at the location where her body was found," Marx said. "We have not been able to establish a motive. No one is in custody."

Frank Pizzulo, director of campus police, said Herstrum's body had been there 12 to 24 hours. "She was frozen to the ground," he said.

Lucas County Coroner James R. Patrick, who performed the autopsy, said Herstrum was wearing blue jeans and a sweatshirt.

Herstrum, of Elmwood Rd., graduated in 1990 from Rocky River High School, where she was a cheerleader her sophomore and senior years. She was also in the school choir, kept statistics for the school hockey team and was a student trainer.

She was a member of the Pi Beta Phi sorority at Toledo.

"This is a terrible shock to us," said Alice Frey, a neighbor on Elmwood. "She was the prettiest girl in this area. Gorgeous. Everybody knew Melissa. I can't get over it."

Frey said the last time she saw Herstrum, her former Plain Dealer carrier, was September when her husband, Arthur, died. "Melissa came over to the house with a casserole," said Frey. "She looked kind of sad and said she had just broken up with her boyfriend."

Frey said Herstrum had an older sister who graduated from Ohio University and is married. Her parents went to Toledo after being notified of the shooting.

Yesterday, Herstrum's crying roommate answered the door at the women's apartment but said she was too upset to talk about the slaying.

Marx said Herstrum and her roommate lived just off the university's main campus in an area known as College Station, home to about 400 students. He said she left her apartment about 4 a.m. Sunday after receiving several telephone calls.

She was reported missing by the roommate, whom Toledo police declined to identify.

About 12:20 a.m. yesterday, Toledo police got a telephone call from a man who said a taxi driver had been robbed on campus and that shots had been fired. Pizzulo said the telephone call might have been a hoax.

He told Associated Press the call came from a man who claimed he was a dispatcher for Checker Cab Co. The company said its dispatcher didn't call police and there was no robbery.

SEE STUDENT/7-A

Student

FROM/1-A

"Two University of Toledo police officers checked the area... and found the body about 12:40 a.m.," Marx said.

He said police did not know whether the reported shooting and killing of Herstrum are connected. "There's a very good possibility the shots heard at that time were not associated with this homicide," he said.

The body was found near the Engineering Technology Laboratory Center of the Scott Park campus, about 1½ miles south of the main campus. Students at Scott Park study for two-year technical degrees.

It's the second instance of gunfire at the university in the last week, according to university spokesman Fred Mollenkopf.

On Jan. 20, six rounds from a semiautomatic pistol were fired into MacKinnon Hall, a resident dormitory for women, barely missing a sleeping student.

Marty Clark, another university spokesman, said there was no reason to believe the incidents were related. But students said they were frightened and one woman displayed a small can of Mace attached to a keychain.

"It scares the daylights out of me," said Andy Pulfer, 21, a finance major from Bellefontaine, O. "It makes you scared to be going out at all."

Kelly Kerber, 20, a sophomore from Sidney, O., lives in the apartment directly below Herstrum's. "I have to go to

a class tomorrow at 6:30 a.m. and I'm scared about that," she said. "I guess I'll just run to the building."

Kerber said she and the slain woman were friendly acquaintances.

Robert Cooley and Mark Brogan, graduate students working on doctorates in clinical psychology, held a counseling session yesterday for about 50 residents of the apartment complex where Herstrum lived.

"We don't hear a lot of anything. They just sit there. They're kind of stunned," said Cooley, who with Brogan works for the university's counseling service. "There was a lot of silence tonight."

"They're still numb," Brogan said. "I think anger will come next."

Mollenkopf said the slaying was the first on campus since the 1930s, when a football player was shot to death as the result of a romance gone bad.

In the last three years, Clark said, there have been a rape, 14 robberies and 19 aggravated assaults on the campus.

At 11 a.m. today, Pizzulo will have an open meeting with students in the Student Union building.

The university's counseling office is working with "students most directly affected by the incident," Mollenkopf said. He said counselors had met with Herstrum's sorority sisters.

Plain Dealer reporters Lou Mio and Mark Rollenhagen contributed to this article.