

Teen jailed in Capitola killing

Months of police work finally pay off with an arrest

By Paul Rogers
Mercury News Staff Writer

Capitola police Wednesday afternoon arrested a 17-year-old Live Oak student in connection with the August robbery and slaying of Emily Shaw outside Capitola Mall.

By Friday, prosecutors are expected to charge Christopher McCarthy, a Santa Cruz County adult education student, with murder committed during the course of a robbery, Santa Cruz County District Attorney Art Danner said. Prosecutors will seek to try McCarthy as an adult, he added.

Citing McCarthy's age, Danner refused to release many details of the case, the biggest crime to hit Capitola in a decade.

Speaking at an evening news conference with Capitola Police Chief Don Branton, Danner did say, however, that investigators had obtained a combination of physical evidence from the crime scene — the lower level of a parking garage near Gottschalks department store — and statements from witnesses who had called a special police tip line.

On Aug. 27, the 78-year-old Shaw was beaten to death outside her car with a piece of firewood during an apparent robbery. She had earlier purchased jewelry in the Capitola Mall, police later reported. Numerous witnesses, including a San Jose couple, saw the attacker attempt to put Shaw's body into

her Honda Civic.

The attacker fled through an opening in a brick wall west of the mall and escaped into a residential neighborhood.

Hampering police efforts was the fact that the assailant's description — blond, blue eyes, young and tall — matched literally hundreds of Capitola skateboarders and surfers.

McCarthy was arrested at his family's house in unincorporated Live Oak "five minutes away from the mall," according to Branton. He was booked into Juvenile Hall.

Shaw's purse, which had been missing, has been recovered, along

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with her jewelry, Branton added. "This was just hard work and good-old fashioned police work," he said of the exhaustive search that led to McCarthy's arrest.

Police interviewed about 150 blond young men, including McCarthy, immediately after the crime. They also called in the FBI when the search dried up.

An announcement last week warning people that the FBI felt the killer could endanger the life of a friend proved important. Branton said after local media reported the warning, investigators manning the tip line received a key call naming McCarthy as a possible suspect.