

Bombing victim gets on with life

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No suspects in Jacobson attack

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SANTA CRUZ — Six months have passed since the nation focused on Santa Cruz when a bomb exploded in attorney Jack Jacobson's hands, and while authorities say they have leads, no suspects have been named.

But according to investigators, going a half-year or longer before cracking a bombing case is not uncommon. In fact, approximately 85 percent of bombing investigations nationwide go unsolved, according to the federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms.

"Look at the Atlanta Olympics bombing — with all the resources in the world and they still haven't solved it," said Santa Cruz County Assistant District Attorney Bob Lee, one of the seven men assigned to the Jacobson case.

Lee also pointed out that it took decades to apprehend accused Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski.

Please see BOMB — BACK PAGE

Bomb

Continued from Page A1

And in that case, Kaczynski's family turned him in.

"In general, bombing cases are difficult because bombs blow up the evidence," Lee said.

Jacobson, 51, meanwhile, plans to return to work full-time soon, said his friends and colleagues. However, the 51-year-old divorce lawyer is keeping a low profile.

"I'm not ready to make a public statement at this time," he said last week.

Longtime friend, attorney Hermia Kaplan, said Jacobson has undergone numerous surgeries, including delicate work on his badly injured hands and removing shrapnel that lodged in his intestine. He lost three fingers on one hand and one finger on the other, said District Attorney Art Danner, who added that surgeons also had to make a series of skin grafts and Jacobson's hands.

The bombing — the first against a person in Santa Cruz County history — occurred on the morning of Dec. 23.

Sitting on the front stoop of Jacobson's second-story Eastside office was a hand-delivered, gift-wrapped package. He picked it up and took it inside, where it detonated in his hands.

Bleeding profusely, he managed to struggle out of his Soquel Avenue office onto the front deck and cry for help.

An off-duty Santa Cruz city firefighter, Mike Venezia, saw Jacobson pacing on the deck and persuaded him to lie down. Venezia, who was later honored by the city for his action, treated Jacobson until emergency crews arrived. Jacobson was flown to Stanford University Medical Center, where he remained more than a month.

At his office, local news reporters covering the bombing were joined by network news media, while agents from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms began collecting what was left of the pipe bomb.

They started the painstaking task of examining the remnants, shipping the evidence to ATF labs in Walnut Creek, Texas and Washington D.C., Lee said.

In Santa Cruz, the ramifications of the bombing are readily apparent at Jacobson's main place of business — the county courthouse.

While most courthouses in major metropolitan areas have tight security, up until the time of the bomb-

ing, Santa Cruz's hall of justice was an open, trusting place with little security.

That innocence is gone. Following the explosion, bomb threats became a near-regular occurrence. First to be installed was a metal detector accompanied by armed sheriff's deputies who hand-checked bags. Doors on all sides of the building were locked, leaving one entrance and one exit.

Then last week, a \$33,000 state-of-the-art X-ray machine was put in place to examine bags for weapons and explosives, said sheriff's Deputy Steve Fitzgerald.

"This will allow us to check people's purses and attache cases without having to physically go through them," Fitzgerald said.

Authorities, in the meantime, have remained tight-lipped about the investigation, especially about naming suspects. They want to avoid another Richard Jewell fiasco.

Jewell reportedly was named by an anonymous FBI source as a prime suspect in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics bombing. After news organizations hounded Jewell for months, the FBI officially declared he was not a suspect.

Even though the amount of information flowing to the public about the Jacobson bombing can best be described as a dribble, it does not mean that law enforcement is ignoring the case, Lee said.

"We just want to make sure that we don't make any mistakes," said Lee, who along with Danner, district attorney's inspector Otis Pogue, Santa Cruz police Sgt. Lee Sepulveda and two ATF agents, is working in the investigation.

"When we make an arrest, we want it to be a good clean case that relies on good evidence," he said.

To that end, over the past 10 days, investigators have received new information from the ATF that they hope will help make this bombing case one of the 15 percent that gets solved.

Investigators began "focusing on a list of individuals" in the hours just after the bombing, Lee said.

According to court records, Jacobson had at least one enemy whom he publicly feared — a 46-year-old local man involved in a bitter divorce with Jacobson's former live-in girlfriend.

Speaking about that man, Jacobson said in court in 1994, "I do, however, fear for my safety and the safety of my family due to the incidents that have occurred in the past."