

# Local Nurses Train To Become Better Examiners in Assault Cases

By Ryan Schlehuder

Nurses at Mackinac Straits Hospital in St. Ignace and the Medical Center on Mackinac Island are better trained to care for victims of sexual assault and protecting evidence following a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program at Kewadin Casino Hotel Convention Center in Sault Ste. Marie March 14 to March 17.

In training were Karen Weersing of Mackinac Island and Mackinac Straits Hospital nurses Carol Elmlad, Denise Longyear, Cal Wilcox, and Melissa Foster. The program was led by Linda Ledray, a registered nurse who began the SANE program in Minneapolis a few years ago.

There were nine rapes or attempted rapes reported in Mackinac County in 2004, the latest figures available.

The importance of the training, said Mrs. Weersing, is to gather legitimate evidence for police investigation and to properly care for the survivor of the traumatic event.

"It's a very tedious and personal thing to go through, but if that person is even thinking of pressing charges, it is a necessary step to recover any DNA evidence that we can," said Mrs. Weersing.



**Karen Weersing of the Mackinac Island Medical Center completed the SANE course.**

There is only a 72-hour window to collect DNA evidence on the body, she said, after which a survivor can still have an examination to test for sexually transmitted diseases, however, recovery of DNA may be impossible.

The training has taught Mrs. Weersing to examine patients more closely.

"Through the training, we've found we may have to probe a little more with some patients, asking them for more information," she said.

Since 2002, when Mrs. Weersing and her husband, Dr.



Don Weersing, Mackinac Island's year-around physician, moved to the Island, the Medical Center has seen fewer than 10 sexual assault-related patient visits.

"I've only dealt with one case so far since I've been here, but I know there are probably a lot more cases that have not been reported. Statistically, we should have a lot more coming through the Medical Center," she said.

She believes survivors may fear the scrutiny of a small

town society such as Mackinac Island or St. Ignace, or examiners are not asking the right

Cal Wilcox, (from left) Carol Elmlad, and Denise Longyear completed the SANE training.

questions.

"Our practice at the Medical Center, like other hospitals, is extremely confidential by law," she said.

Now that the nurses have gone through the training, they can take a written examination to be fully certified through the SANE program. Nurses are asked to perform a number of pelvic exams and familiarize themselves with rape kits before taking the certification test, said Mrs. Weersing.

The nurses' training was funded through the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

## New Questions Surface in Straus Fence Debate

By Leslie Rott

The proposed construction of a fence on public property in Hubbard's Annex by Fran and Lorna Straus has raised new questions about just where the city property boundary lines are and a new city survey has been ordered.

The Strauses have asked to build a fence on city property, but the city has been hesitant to allow encroachment on the right-of-way used for the city street. Part of the problem centers around a 100-foot road right-of-way noted on the city plat map.

City attorney Tom Evashevski told the city's Streets and Sidewalks Committee Thursday, May 18, that he feels the right-of-way may be 66

feet, centered on the existing road, based on highway-by-user concepts, leaving 34 feet, or approximately 17 feet on either side, questionable as to the actual owner. For the city to claim the road, Mr. Evashevski said, the roadway would have to be used and funded by the public for 10 years, which is known as highway-by-user.

It came to the city's attention, however, that the center line of the road may not actually be dead center, and that certain areas of any given property in the Annex could have four potential owners, the City of Mackinac Island, an adjacent property owner, the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, and the common areas platted in Hubbard's Annex, monitored by the Hubbard's Annex Homeowners Association.

As for the state park boundaries, noted Mackinac Island State Park Commission Director Phil Porter, "We know quite specifically" where they are.

Mr. Porter told the *Town Crier* that the Commission owns two lots in the Annex, but no longer holds ownership of any of the roads in that area.

The 17 feet is being called "no man's land" by Mr. Evashevski, since there are so many potential owners.

"Somebody has to own it," said the city zoning administrator, Dennis Dombroski. "If it's not publicly owned, then it has to be owned privately by somebody."

The decision was made to have the Annex surveyed, and if it is found that the proposed fence would be built on city property, the Streets and Sidewalks Committee and then City Council would have to decide whether to permit it.

"We can't debate anything if we don't know anything," committee member Mike Hart said, in regard to the question of where one property line ends and the other begins.

The question of property lines in the Straus issue could have significant ramifications on any future development.

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