



# Alive!



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## St. Patrick's Parade Turns Into a Festival

Budget crunch turns  
parade into more  
commercial festival.

**COUNCIL** — The budget crunch has claimed another victim - the annual St. Patrick's Day parade and after-party in Griffith Park.

But AEG/L.A. Live has stepped in and turned it into a festival centered not on City property but on the burgeoning live entertainment and commercial square near the Convention Center and Staples Center.

The festival is co-sponsored, as was the parade and after-party, by Mr. L.A., Councilman and Club Member Tom LaBonge.

The festival, set for between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Wednesday, March 17, is set to feature live music, a beer garden, ceremonies, Irish food and dancing, celebrity guests, the LAPD Emerald Society Bagpipe Band, and more.

Sponsor proceeds benefit the LAFD Historical Society.

For more information, see the flyer on page 9, or visit [www.lalive.com](http://www.lalive.com) or [www.tomlabonge.com](http://www.tomlabonge.com)

## Testing the Evidence



### [ LAPD Narcotics Lab ]

The LAPD's  
narcotics lab is  
one of the dept.'s  
powerful tools to  
test evidence and  
keep the City safe.

SEE PAGE 26

Cherie Will, Supervisor,  
holds a narcotics color test  
in the LAPD's main narcotics lab.



Alive! photo by Tom Hawkins



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# Testing the

In the LAPD's new Scientific Investigative Division headquarters in Los Angeles, the narcotics lab has one mission – to find out the truth of the evidence, whether it favors the police or the accused. It's justice through science.





# Evidence



## LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION

Administration

Quality Assurance

Field

Toxicology/Blood Alcohol

**Narcotics**

Trace

Questioned Documents

Serology/DNA

Firearms

Latents/Chemical Processing

Polygraphs

Electronics

Photography



Criminalist Habib Barye examines evidence under a microscope.



# Matter of Justice



From left: Criminalists Daryl Chan, Jane Villegas and Andrea Mazzola analyze evidence.

*Alive!* Interview

## The Narcotics Lab: Good Science

An interview with Cherie Will, Supervising Criminalist.



Supervising Criminalist Cherie Will explains how the lab functions.

On Feb. 11, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* editor John Burnes sat down with Cherie Will, Supervising Criminalist of the LAPD's main narcotics lab in her office in the Forensic Sciences Center on the campus of Cal State LA. — Ed.

**Alive!**: Thanks for talking to us today, Cherie. Let's start with this: What's the purpose of the narcotics lab? What's its function?

**Cherie Will:** Its function is to analyze items of evidence for controlled substances, and then identify them and report the findings so that the information can be used to further the investigation, whether it's the prosecution of a crime or some other purpose that the investigators or the district attorney's office feel it's necessary for.

You work independently, meaning, you're a pure scientist. You are here to discover what there is to be discovered.

**Cherie:** Yes. We use regular chemical methods like chemistry, as well as our instruments, to make that determination.

What direction would you suggest they go to be trained and educated to be able to do this kind of job?

**Cherie:** For a criminalist, the basic requirement, educationally, is an undergraduate four-year degree in either biology, chemistry or one of the disciplines closely related, such as biochemistry, molecular biology, somewhere in that area of science. And over and above that, laboratory experience always helps. We tend not to hire criminalists directly out of college, so we'd like them to have some work laboratory experience. And then there are advanced degrees. We have about 150 criminalists or so. About 30 percent of them have advanced degrees.

Meaning a Master's?

**Cherie:** A Master's degree. We have four people who have Ph.D.s who work here as criminalists.

At one time, were the employees here mainly sworn officers?

**Cherie:** I think long, long ago, the crime labs associated with or directly as part of a police department employed police officers to do laboratory work. Laboratory work is very specialized and requires education that most police officers don't have. And to do the science that we do, we employ scientists.

We were told that there are presently 50 to 60 controlled substances that you can check for and analyze. Does that sound right?

**Cherie:** That sounds about right.

And you network with other agencies to see different ways to look at what you might find.

**Cherie:** As needed, if we come across something that's out of the ordinary, and we haven't seen it in any of our publications, we'll write about it and take photographs and share it with everybody.

What about prescription drugs? Do you have to have signatures or profiles of thousands of prescription medications?

**Cherie:** We do. Many prescription drugs are controlled. We see a lot of different prescription drugs come through here – Vicodin, Valium, diazepam. We see a lot of benzodiazepines, Xanax. Those are drugs of abuse, and just because they're prescription doesn't make them less abused. If someone's arrested and those are confiscated, we have to identify them, and we do that routinely.

### Pressures of Time and Budget

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# [LAPD Narcotics Lab]



## The goal of the narcotics unit is to discover the truth of the evidence.

Photos by Angel Gomez, Member Services Manager, and Tom Hawkins, Club photographer

Cherie (Cheryl) Will, Supervising Criminalist of the LAPD's main narcotics lab, was talking on the phone to an LAPD officer. The drug he expected her to find – the sample found during a recent arrest – wasn't what he thought it was. It wasn't heroin, it was hashish (concentrated cannabis) plus Ecstasy, she told him. Cherie knew that fact because her crew of scientists just behind her had done the "basic chemistry" on the sample.

The news surprised him, as it somehow altered his case. But it was the truth, and that's her job, and the job of the LAPD's narcotics lab. Whatever way it may go, tell the truth.

"We work independently," Cherie says.

The lab's procedures dictate



Criminalist Edgar Eugenio holding a ceramic spot plate, used in color tests.

that 25 percent of all negatives are run again, and "anything that's questionable" gets run through the GCMS (Gas Chromatograph Mass Spectrometer; see section on procedures) for a more definitive analysis.

The state decides which substances are controlled via legislation, Cherie explains. The district attorney's office informs the lab which substances they must have the ability to check for generally. At present, the lab has between 50 and 60 controlled substance standards they can check against, meaning, the lab is certified to make definitive determinations that evidence can be any one of 50 to 60 different controlled substances.

"We're set up to identify the most commonly abused drugs," says Rick Raffel, the lab's assistant supervisor.

The lab really isn't seeing any-

thing new in terms of substances, Cherie says, but occasionally they do see common controlled substances packaged in a unique way. They had just seen Ecstasy packaged in gelcaps, she said, and while *Alive!* was there, the lab was testing an evidence sample of licorice dipped in chocolate for hidden controlled substances.

Through its digital newsletter titled *Microgram*, the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration distributes information and trends about controlled substances to labs and enforcement agencies throughout the country. The LAPD's narcotics lab has contributed intelligence and information to the newsletter on occasion.

**For more information on how the lab operates, read the step-by-step procedural section, plus the interview with Cherie.**



Criminalist Jose Gonzalez prepares evidence. Top right: Evidence to be tested. Above: Criminalist Jane Villegas examines evidence with a low-power microscope.

### Alive! Interview

# Helping Solve Crimes: 'It's Very Satisfying'

*Alive!* interviews Yvette Sanchez-Owens, Commanding Officer, Scientific Investigation Division.



Yvette Sanchez-Owens, Commanding Officer, Scientific Investigation Division.

On Feb. 17, Club CEO John Hawkins and *Alive!* editor John Burnes spent the afternoon with Yvette Sanchez-Owens in her office at the Forensic Science Center in Los Angeles. —Ed.

**Alive!** Thanks for sitting down with us, Yvette.

**Yvette Sanchez-Owens:** Well, we are excited to showcase our work. We do some good work here.

How did you get here?

**Yvette:** It's an interesting history. I started off in the City Clerk's Office 25 years ago. And then I worked my way over to General Services in the Building Unit for awhile. And then I took a promotion to CDD and ran a construction project for them.

Which project?

**Yvette:** It was Neighborhood Development, and we had [federal] grants that we used to help neighborhood 501C3s that do work in impoverished neighborhoods mostly. And we help them with their facilities.

I came over to the Police Department in '94. I worked for the Police Commission as their liaison to the City Council and also in charge of reviewing officer-involved

shootings and law enforcement-related injuries and deaths, making recommendations to the Commission as to how they should deal with it. And then from there, I got picked up to work in Chief [Bernard] Parks' backroom, doing manuals and orders for a couple of years.

Someone found out that I had some building experience and tapped me for a job as Commanding Officer of LAPD Facilities Division. And I did that for eight years. All these new buildings that are coming online? Those are my babies. The new Metro Jail, the new Parker Center, the new area stations that came online. The two brand new divisions that we just got in the last couple years; all of those are my work. I had some pretty good successes with that and someone said, "Hey, we need someone strong over at SID. Can you go over there?" And that's how I got here.

When did you take over here?

**Yvette:** I believe it was about four years ago in June.

Give us a brief overview of the SID for people who have no idea what you do.

**Yvette:** Sure. Our primary function is in support of the patrol cops and the detectives who are the sworn component of the department. And our task is to collect evidence, analyze it, provide results and testify in court as to the results that we came up with. We basically help them solve crimes.

SID is comprised of a variety of very specialized classifications -- fingerprint specialists, criminalists, photographers, polygraph examiners; those are just a few of them. There's like I said, 370 authorities assigned to the division. We operate 24/7. We operate out of five locations. That's generally the overview.



**Alive! Interview with Cherie Will**

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Has the number of cases been increasing, decreasing, or about the same?

**Cherie:** It ebbs and flows, based on what the priority is for enforcement for the Police Dept. Right now, it seems like the number of cases that we're dealing with is going down. The over-enforcement of narcotics crimes seems to be waning a little bit. It seems like the focus of the police department is on something else.

So it's not to say there's less drug usage, it's just there's not as many busts?

**Cherie:** That's what it seems like, that the focus of the department may be on Homeland Security-type issues, rather than hand-to-hand drug sales. It's a matter of what the department focuses on. We are reactive in that regard. We take what is given to us. We have to analyze, say, 30 cases for tomorrow. Well, we'll analyze 30 cases for tomorrow. If it's 10, then we'll analyze 10. We're simply reactive to the investigations that are conducted and the arrests they've made, and what's needed to move those cases forward.

What are the pressures on the narcotics lab right now? I know there's the budget crisis, but

there are some general pressures, too?

**Cherie:** It's the same pressures that have been encountered by the laboratory for years -- to get all the cases analyzed in time for whatever legal proceedings there are. For most of the evidence we test, the report has to be completed -- and therefore all the

analysis has to be completed -- in time for arraignment, which is usually 48 hours after the arrest. A good 60 to 70 percent of the cases that we analyze have to be completed within 48 hours of the arrest. That puts quite a demand on the laboratory.

And now with the furloughs that we've all been forced to take, all of my staff, including me and my boss and his boss, all have to take an unpaid day off every other week, so that reduces our staffing by 10 percent. So that's another stress.

And then, of course, it lowers everybody's paycheck. That's an added stress. And we've had to fill in the time that they're gone with overtime, to get some of our basic responsibilities handled.

And criminals don't suspend their evidence production when you're on furlough, do they?

**Cherie:** No. They do not.

Maybe they didn't get the memo.

**Cherie:** They're not furloughed. Just us.

**The Truth of the Matter**

How do you like the new lab?

**Cherie:** It's great. We've been here about two-and-a-half years. It's very nice. It's substantially larger than our other space was, so being able to see the other people who work around here, and lunch with them and so on, is lost. But we have more room, at least generally. The laboratory itself is not substantially bigger than our other one.

Seeing what you've done, putting everyone together in this environment, is really nice. Are you proud of your lab? Do they do a good job?

**Cherie:** I think we do an excellent job. I think that most of the people that look from the outside in, don't see all the hard work that's done. You guys have been in the laboratory for what, three, four hours now?

Right.

**Cherie:** See all the hard work that goes on, the intensity with which the people conduct their work? They're very focused, and they are absolutely insistent that they do good work. When it's questioned, they get pretty irritated when the officers question their

results, because their results are correct. And the officers may not know what they're dealing with. So we take pride in the chemistry that we do, because we do good chemistry.

That's important.

**Cherie:** It's absolutely essential. We can't do our job if our results are dictated by the police officers, so we don't allow that to happen.

The defense in the cases that we work on have the opportunity to get a piece of the evidence and test it themselves. They get splits. These are routine. Sometimes they fingerprint it, sometimes they swab it, sometimes it's simply photographs. Sometimes it's all of those, and a part of the evidence is also cut off and shared with the defense so that they can test it if they wish. Happens all the time.

So you're after the truth.

**Cherie:** Simply the truth. Whether it's what the officers want to hear or not is pretty much irrelevant. We routinely get items of evidence that are submitted as cocaine, and they're not; they're meth. That's not uncommon. We simply report what we find.

That's it. Simply the facts, and that's it.

Whether it's negative, and therefore charges will not be filed on that particular item, is irrelevant to us. It's just simply chemistry for us. We're just simply after the truth of the matter.

It seems to me you're keeping the system as fair as possible.

**Cherie:** That's part of the ethics of good forensics, that it be conducted in an unbiased fashion.

**Sometimes Not So Routine**

Have you had any unique or unusual cases that required a little bit out of the ordinary?

**Cherie:** We have one going now, but it's an open case, so we can't discuss it. You may hear about it in the news in a while.

You smiled, though, so it must be interesting.

**Cherie:** Yes. It's very interesting.

Any others, then?

**Cherie:** Oh, gosh. Everything's very routine. I guess the special stuff is within the chemistry. It's not something that most people would find exciting.

We're getting ready to bring new instruments on line that will give us more capabilities in the lab. That's kind of exciting for us, but it doesn't sound like much. There's one instrument in lab way back in the corner. It's a gas chromatograph FID -- a flame ionization detector. It will allow us to quantify drugs. Right now, we can identify what's present, but not how much of that. Well, this instrument will allow us to say how much of that drug is present, in the event that that information is necessary. For most prosecutions, it's not. If cocaine is present, it doesn't matter if it's ten percent or 50 percent or 80 percent. It doesn't matter. Well, in some cases, it matters. There was a case out of San Diego, I believe, the detectives were calling around to the various laboratories, trying to find one that could quantify drugs. They suspected they had a paramedic siphoning off morphine from his paramedic truck, and replacing it with saline. The amount of morphine in these pre-prepared morphine shots was not what it was supposed to be. It was substantially less. Our testing couldn't answer their question. We could say that that morphine is there or not, but they knew that. Knowing that it's five percent instead of 20 percent mattered to the case, but we couldn't help them. So we're bringing this instrument online and develop a method so that we can quantify drugs. That's exciting for us, to be able to add that additional service to our repertoire.

# A [step-by-step guide] Meticulous

## ▶ Before the Narcotics Lab

- 1** Officer makes arrest and collects sample.
- 2** The officer prepares a property report.
- 3** The evidence is entered into the property system.
- 4** An LAPD courier unit physically transports the evidence to the Scientific Investigation Division's (SID) Forensic Science Center (FSC), 1800 Paseo Rancho Castilla Dr. in Monterey Park, on the campus of Cal State LA. The FSC building is shared with L.A. County Sheriff Dept.'s crime labs.
- 5** The evidence either stays at the FSC facility or is further transported to the narcotics satellite lab in Van Nuys.
- 6** The LAPD filing team determines which cases are going to be filed. These are the samples that the lab will analyze.
- 7** A list of the evidence to be sampled arrives at the FSC property room. Most suspects must be arraigned (formally charged before a judge) in 48 hours, so the timing and analyses of the cases are critical.
- 8** The property room pulls the evidence of the cases to be analyzed.
- 9** Narcotics lab employee Aaron Mayse walks to the property room, signs out the evidence (organized into sealed and stamped manila envelopes) and brings them to the narcotics lab.



Supervising Criminalist Cherie Will and Lab Tech Aaron Mayse look over the evidence property paperwork. The custody of evidence is tracked at all times.



Cherie Will explains *Microgram*, the FDA's periodic bulletin on controlled substances.

And [additionally] the appearance of the drugs is what, really, I find interesting: all the different MDMA Ecstasy pills. They have all kinds of different imprints, and so on. They're not always what you think they are.

You were talking earlier about a case of Ecstasy in gelcaps.

**Cherie:** Right. We encountered some MDMA, which is Ecstasy. Usually, we find them, or we receive them, in pre-pressed pills in various colors and with various impression-markings on them. But these were just regular gelcaps, and they had a brown or tan-colored powder in them. We had not seen MDMA packaged that way. That was kind of unusual, so that got written up, and it was published in *Microgram*.

That's the DEA's e-newsletter?





[LAPD Narcotics Lab]

# Process

Here's a step-by-step guide, following the evidence through the system, landing at the narcotics lab and working its way to conclusion. It's a carefully managed process to track sample custody and results. The first steps occur before the evidence reaches the narcotics lab.

Generally, the lab has 48 hours to process a piece of evidence; suspects must be arraigned within 48 hours of their arrest under most circumstances.

## ▶ At the Lab

- 10** The evidence is stored in the lab's holding room.
- 11** A lab analyst enters the holding room and, according to process, chooses the next case to be analyzed.



Criminalist Andrea Mazzola prepares evidence to be tested for color and microcrystals.



Criminalist Habib Barye selects the next evidence kit to be analyzed.

## ▶ The Analysis Begins

- 12 PHOTOGRAPHY:** The evidence packet is carefully opened and extensively photographed, one sample at a time. Narcotics evidence cannot be physically present in court, so carefully documented photographic proof is critical.



Criminalist Jose Gonzalez photographs the contents of an evidence kit before he begins to analyze it.

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## Alive! Interview with Yvette Sanchez-Owens

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Where do you have people?

**Yvette:** The SID has facilities at Piper Tech, at the recruit training center in Westchester, in Van Nuys and at the old Parker Center. We still have folks there.

What are your day-to-day functions?

**Yvette:** I'm the administrative head of the division, so primarily I'm making sure that policies and procedures are being followed. If new technology or anything comes up, we look at that and decide if we're going to incorporate that into our operation, and we develop policies and procedures for that. I'm the one who pushes for the budget. I'm the one that fights the battles with the Council and even internally in our own department; everyone is fighting for resources. Anytime there is any kind of a controversy or an issue, I'm the spokesperson for the division, so I'm out there in front.

### Tight Budgets

When you took this over, did you think that the financial aspects would be this much of your job?

**Yvette:** I've been around the City for what, 25, almost 26 years now. We go through cycles.

This is probably the worst I've ever seen in my 25 years. It's always a challenge fighting for money and resources. Always. Did I anticipate it being this bad? Who could have guessed it? But we work through that.

I'm used to fighting those battles and I'm fairly successful, even in these hard times. We have a project that we're working on, the DNA Backlog Project. And we're probably one of the only divisions in the entire City that's gotten any kind of resources in the last couple of years. So, we're pretty successful at showing need and demonstrating the usefulness of the resources that we're asking for. We've been very fortunate.

As budgets become tighter, are you seeing the workload increasing or more demands put on the division?

**Yvette:** I wouldn't say that the workload is increasing. It's fairly steady. But the difficulty for us is this particular division for up until recently was predominantly represented by the Engineers and Architects union, whose negotiations with the City have resulted in basically every one of their employees taking furlough days. So, with probably 95 percent of the staff here, I have about 370 authorities [certified employees]; 95 percent of those authorities are



Yvette Sanchez-Owens, Commanding Officer, outside the Forensic Sciences Center.

on furloughs. So I lost 10 percent of my capacity right off.

And those negotiations are outside of your realm?

**Yvette:** Right. Those were handled at a much higher level. The CAO handles that for the entire City.

Our basic budget's pretty much frozen over the last year. We're not getting any increases. The only exception to that is the DNA Backlog

Project; I did get 26 position-authorities for that unit. We're still trying to hire those.

### In the News: The DNA Backlog Project

Let's talk about the DNA project, then.

**Yvette:** Right. I don't know how familiar you are with that project, but essentially what happened was, we haven't always had DNA capability in the division. It's evolved over time. I believe the first time this division ever had any kind of DNA capability was in the 1990s. There were crimes committed prior to the '90s in which they collected some evidence that includes biological evidence. So, as the technology and the capability have increased, they've said, "Hey, we can go back to some of those old unsolved crimes and maybe solve them?" In the Backlog Project, those are strictly sexual assault/rape-type cases that we are working.

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# A Meticulous Process: The Analysis Begins

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**13 WEIGHING:** If a sample needs to be weighed, it is weighed.



A lab scale.

**14 THE COLOR TEST:** A simple chemical test is performed. Chemicals are added to evidence samples to give a general direction of analysis. Depending on the chemical reagent used, evidence turning a certain color indicates that that sample could be a controlled substance such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana, PCP, Ecstasy, methamphetamine, or a number of other substances.



Above: bottles of chemical reagents in front of evidence. Above right: A color test.



**15 THE MICROCRYSTAL TEST:** After seeing that a certain process causes a chemical reaction and changes the sample's color, a further test is performed to confirm the preliminary test. This is a microcrystal test: Samples are placed on a slide and viewed under a microscope. Most controlled substances have a very unique look when viewed at this size. [SEE PAGE 35 FOR PICTURES OF CRYSTALS]



Criminalist Andrea Mazzola examines slides of evidence.



Criminalist Daryl Chan examines evidence using an infrared scanner.

**16 INFRARED:** If the microcrystal test is inconclusive, or under other circumstances, the next step in evidence analysis requires running the samples through sophisticated machinery, getting a chart on that sample's properties, and then comparing it to a chart of a known and certified controlled substance. If the charts match, then identification can be made positively. The first of these specialty machines is an infrared scanner. Materials are placed on the top, and infrared light is blasted through, exciting the molecules. Different chemicals give off different energies as they calm down; these rates are measured and recorded.

## Alive! Interview with Cherie Will

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

**Cherie:** Right, it's a DEA [the federal Drug Enforcement Administration] publication for informing laboratories all over the country of stuff that's on the market.

People can submit articles, and then it gets distributed nationwide?

**Cherie:** Right. They're small, little articles. [Cherie pulls up a copy on her computer monitor.] Here's a *Microgram* from April 2009.

[Reading:] "Turtle-shaped chocolates."

**Cherie:** They contain psilocybin mushrooms. Isn't that cute? Now, we have chocolate here in our lab. [Narcotics lab criminalist] Aletha [Basconillo] worked on something like a chocolate bar, a regular chocolate bar, but it had crushed-up mushroom pieces in it that were hallucinogenic mushrooms. Whenever we encounter something that we haven't found here, and we find unusual, we'll write it up in a little article like this and submit it to the *Microgram*.

[She's still reading:] Okay, now, there's a blue Ecstasy pill in the shape of Garfield.

Wow.

**Cherie:** It's little. We find all kinds of different stuff in these [kinds of pills].

Can your analysis ever determine the origin of a drug?

**Cherie:** No.

Certain countries or certain labs don't leave tell-tale signs?

**Cherie:** We don't do that kind of analysis. The DEA may follow the trail of distribution. That may be one of their functions, but we don't do any of that.

You must drool over these unusual things.

**Cherie:** Yes.

Amazing.

**Cherie:** Here are some more Ecstasy pills. There's something from Texas, some kind of a steroid. And something from Ohio, in a false bottom in some shoes. It holds heroin -- nice, clean, pretty heroin.

Heroin looks the same as cocaine, which looks the same as meth. They all look the same.

**Cherie:** Maybe in photographs like this, but they have a different texture. Cocaine has a different texture than methamphetamine and heroin. Some of them are grainy. Some of them are flaky. They're just different.

### Importance Beyond TV

How important is what you do for the city of L.A.?

**Cherie:** The laboratory, in general, is part of the support system for the mission of the police department. We provide scientific support for the investigations that are conducted by the



Supervising Criminalist Cherie Will explains a point to Club CEO John Hawkins.





[LAPD Narcotics Lab]

Alive! Interview with Yvette Sanchez-Owens

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**17** The second automated machine used to chart and identify a substance is the Gas Chromatograph Mass Spectrometer (GCMS), a more rigorous and complex testing device that is not always needed. If a highly detailed analysis is required, samples are run through the machine, which creates a chemical "fingerprint" for the substance, according to Rick Raffel, lab criminalist. Again, the procedure creates a unique chart, and that chart is compared to charts from known and certified controlled substances.



Above: Criminalist Daryl Chan prepares evidence for the GCMS machine.

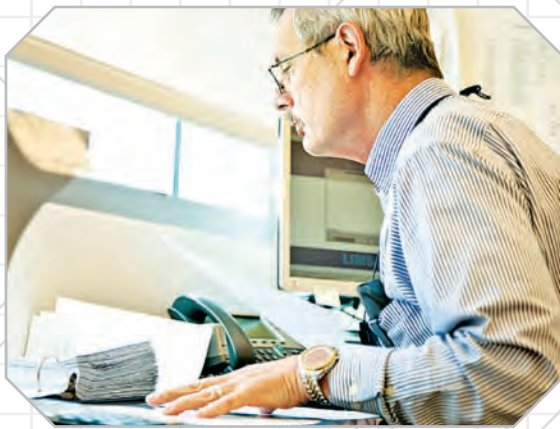


**18** After the previous tests have been performed, the criminalists almost always will have an answer, one way or another, as to what kind of substance the police have captured as evidence. The final step for lab criminalist is to write up a complete report of their findings.

Criminalist Habib Barye fills out the necessary paperwork.

**19 PAPERWORK/QUALITY CONTROL:** A lab supervisor (in this case, Rick Raffel), checks all the paperwork thoroughly before the reports are released to the LAPD and the District Attorney's office.

Rick Raffel, Criminalist III, quality-checks the lab's paperwork.



**20 TRAINING:** Educating new lab criminalists is an important part of the lab's day-to-day functions.



A training session.

When I got here about four years ago, we did not have the resources to handle everything that was coming in the door, and we never had the resources to handle the stuff that was older. So, probably about six months to a year after I got here, the chief of police, Chief [William] Bratton said, "We need to do all of those cases that we have some biological evidence in that are still within statute dates." So, we did a little count and we found out we had more than 7,000 cases.

Wow. Still within statute [of limitations]?

**Yvette:** Still within or nearing statute. And we still didn't have the resources. So we made a pitch, and we got a lot of help from former Councilman [Jack] Weiss. He was our master cheerleader over there, fighting with us to try to get the resources.

We put together a plan and said if you want us to tackle those, we can give you a menu of options. We can try to build up our staff here and tackle all of it, but we're probably going to lose some because we can't get them trained fast enough. They're going to fall off on statute. Or we can do part of it, outsourcing part of it, or we can outsource all of it. We gave them the dollar costs and the timeframes for getting that work done under each scenario, and they chose to go with contracting out. It was fastest and probably cheapest, but they also decided that we need to build up the in-house staff so that we don't ever have this problem again. So we came at it from both angles -- build up the in-house capability and get rid of that backlog ASAP. So they gave us some money for outsourcing and they started building our in-house capacity by giving us resources to train, and that's the 26 authorities [positions] I got this year and the 16 I got last year. We have another ten that we're going to propose for next year, and that should give us the entire number of positions that we think we need to handle all the cases that we traditionally get, which is somewhere around 1,200 to 1,300 cases a year.

When will the hiring and training be done?

**Yvette:** The hiring has been ongoing. We're still waiting for the final authority to hire the 26 positions we got this year. The 16 that we got last year are all hired and in the training program, which takes anywhere from six months to two years for each person. So, even if they gave them to me today, I might not be able to put them to case work for up to two years.

But the backlog is being outsourced.

**Yvette:** Right. We're outsourcing that whole backlog. That has always been the plan because that is the fastest and cheapest way to get it done in the most timely fashion.

Are you taking the oldest cases first with the most pressure on statute of limitations?

**Yvette:** We're doing a combination of things. This has been an evolving project, and the technology has evolved over time. We never knew what the potential was when we started. And now that we've got our hands wrapped around that, we were tackling only the oldest cases first to make sure we didn't lose any on statute. Now we're well ahead of the statute. So now we're focusing on the most serious of crimes.

Have any cases gone through that you can say because of what we've done, this case was solved?

**Yvette:** There's one huge case, the John Floyd Thomas case. It was a serial rapist/murderer case and it was just in the paper. We solved it with the DNA.

It seems to me that there may be some tension because you are bringing in additional people and outside help, but you still have come people on furlough. Has there been some tension because of that?

**Yvette:** Definitely. I wish that I had the authority to maybe tone down the hiring so

that I could put the folks I have here to work, but even that's shaky because, like I said, if you're a new hire, you might not be able to do casework for me for two years. I wish I could put the case-working analysts who are on furlough to work, but I don't have the authority to do that. It's an across-the-board policy that our council and mayor have made.

How are the employees handling being in the news because of the budget crisis and the DNA backlog issues? Do they talk about it at all?

**Yvette:** Well, sure. No one wants their dirty laundry aired, of course. However, humans do make mistakes, and I think our folks are adult enough and mature enough to accept that. It's kind of a bitter pill to swallow, but I think they know that the management here -- myself, all the way up to the Chief -- is very supportive and recognizes the resource deficiency that has sometimes contributed to why we're in the news. And I'm hoping that they understand that we are still working very hard to try to change those things and make it better for them. A lot of them have come down and talked to me personally and have said, yeah, they're not happy about it, but they understand and they're willing to work on it. And I'm very appreciative of that.

We've got great people over here, and I would love to see them recognized more for what they do.

The New Facility

Why was this facility developed and built, and what does this facility allow the LAPD to do that it could not do before or not at the same level?

**Yvette:** The idea for this building started probably ten, 15 years ago, well before my time. There was always a need to improve the facility for the folks and the type of work they're doing. It's my understanding that SID was predominantly housed in Parker Center when they started, but they quickly outgrew it. At some point in time, maybe the late 1980s, they'd gotten so big for their britches that part of them got moved over to Piper Tech, and some space was built out for them. When they built that space out, they built the DNA component for only eight people. When I came in, they had more than double that in that space trying to do DNA work.

So, somebody way back, ten or 15 years ago, had an idea; "We really need our own building, and we need all of our functions to be in one place." So they pursued that in conjunction with the Sheriff's department, which was basically in the same dilemma. They joined forces [to build a new building], and Sheriff [Lee] Baca spearheaded it. He pushed very hard for a bond measure. The bond measure did not pass, but by a very narrow margin. So Sheriff Baca was adamant. "We're so close. We've got to find a way." He talked to the governor at the time, [Gray] Davis, to try to get them to finance it. And lo and behold, he was able to get some funding, but not the entire amount. That meant that they would have to scale down the size of this building, and not every unit from both agencies could come over here. Roughly half my division is in this building, and the rest are in the other locations.

Can this building expand?

**Yvette:** This building is at max capacity now. Sheriff Baca and our Chief would like for us to be able to expand at some point, but of course, finances the way they are, it's not a good time. But the thought is that at some point in time, we would pursue funding and build an annex on the parking lot outside to be able to house the rest of the units from both agencies.



# A Meticulous Process

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

## Back Into the System

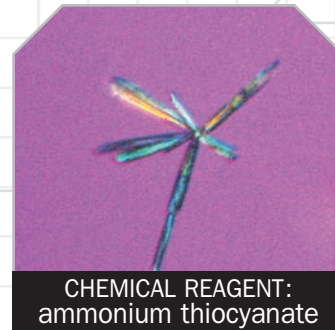
- 20** Into the Holding Room: The evidence samples are repackaged and put back into the holding room.
- 21** Aaron Mayse returns the evidence samples to the building's property room, and the custody of the evidence changes from the narcotics lab to the property division.
- 22** The evidence packets remain in the property room of the Forensic Science Center for approximately 30 days before they are shipped out.



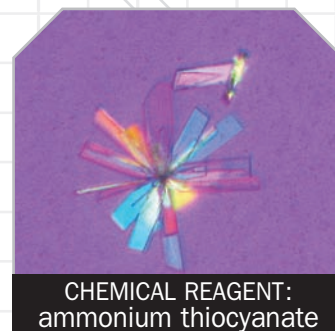
Supervising Criminalist Cherie Will sorts evidence in the holding room.



**PCP**  
(Phencyclidine)



CHEMICAL REAGENT:  
ammonium thiocyanate



CHEMICAL REAGENT:  
ammonium thiocyanate

## Alive! Interview with Yvette Sanchez-Owens

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

Was the development of this building influenced at all by the O.J. Simpson case?

**Yvette:** What I was told was that the major thing that came out of O.J. Simpson case was the fact that lab was not accredited. After O.J. Simpson, the City allowed this division to pursue accreditation, and they were successful sometime in the 1990s I believe. They have maintained that accreditation ever since.

Are other cities envious of this building?

**Yvette:** I would guess probably some of them are, although there have been quite a few new labs that have cropped up recently. We're one of the biggest ones in the country.

What does this building allow you to do that you were not able to do? What capacities does it give you that you did not have before?

**Yvette:** For me personally, I have a lot more of my staff immediately available to me if I need to have a question answered or go up and see what's going on. Half of them are right here, whereas before I had maybe a quarter of them immediately available to me. So, for me personally, that's huge.

The other things that we've noticed is, criminals don't necessarily confine themselves to committing crimes in the same jurisdiction all the time. So sometimes we have, say, a weapon that's used in the City and also in the county, which is Sheriff's territory. [Transferring evidence] could take three months between them packaging it up and getting it over here and us doing our thing and then packaging it up and sending it back. The very first real beautiful product of this building was a case just like that. We went upstairs and test-fired the gun together [with the Sheriff's Dept.]. We got the answer immediately rather than in three months' time. It's awesome.

Has it helped the camaraderie between sheriffs and LAPD?

**Yvette:** I don't know that they didn't get along, but we never really interacted like we do now. It's been a wonderful thing because we learn from each other. They might be doing something slightly different, but as we look at it, "Hey, you know what? That's actually better." And vice-versa. So folks talk all the time. We try to have periodic get-togethers. We have a holi-

day potluck and a summer barbecue. It's been really good because people talk and they share experiences.

The same applies for my counterpart on the Sheriff's side and me. We talk and share ideas and collaborate on how we're going to attack our DNA Project. They were tasked with the same thing, so we compared notes on how we were going to attack it. So, it's been a great thing.

### The SID: Next Steps

Are there more capabilities or greater capacities; things that you think the division can do five, ten years in the future? When budget gets back to normal, where do you think you can go?

**Yvette:** There is lots we can do. About two or three years ago, this division was party to a grant that was studying the effects of DNA testing on burglary crimes. The results of that study were just phenomenal. It showed that if we put some resources on analyzing burglary crime DNA, we could take a lot of people off the street. Our problem again though is, we never had the resources to do that. Once the grant ended, so did that project. We don't have the capacity today to [analyze DNA from] property crimes, but I can certainly see that when times get better, that's something we definitely need to go into. I think there's that saying that Chief Bratton used to say and Chief Beck says now -- roughly 10 percent of the criminals out there are committing 90 percent of the crimes. If we can catch them when they're doing property crimes before they escalate to the more serious crimes, we can have a huge impact. This division could be a force multiplier for this work. If we can get there at some point, and I think we will, it will have a huge impact.

Those DNA samples are not regularly taken for property crimes?

**Yvette:** They are sometimes taken, but we don't have the capacity to test them unless they rise to a certain level.

For example, there's a murder involved.

**Yvette:** Exactly.

So to do DNA analysis at that basic level, might create a huge impact down the line.

**Yvette:** That's right.

### CSI, for Real

You really enjoy your job.

**Yvette:** I do. Like I said, I've been with the City 25 years, with almost all of those years in a supervisory capacity in one sort or another. But never was I in charge of a division this size or this varied. It was a huge learning experience for me, a gigantic learning curve. And even though

I've been here almost four years, I'm still learning. And the folks here? Awesome. They're just really good people, really dedicated to their work, and a lot of fun.

Solving crimes or freeing suspects who were wrongly accused, must be a different kind of satisfaction than what you had before.

**Yvette:** It's a totally different satisfaction. When they first wanted me, I was a little bit sad because I really wanted to see the building projects through to the end. I think every single one of the projects I started eight, nine years ago will be online this year. I was a little bit saddened when I was told they wanted me to move over here because I wanted to see that through.

But the satisfaction I get here is exactly what you're describing. You're putting bad guys away, keeping the people safe. And we're also making sure that the wrongly accused are not falsely imprisoned, and that's very satisfying. How would you feel if your son or your daughter were accused and you know they were with you that night?

Wrong place at the wrong time.

**Yvette:** Exactly. So, it's very satisfying, very satisfying.

Do you watch any of the CSIs?

**Yvette:** Before I got this job, I used to watch every CSI. And if I wasn't going to be home, I taped every one. I don't get to watch much TV nowadays, but yes, CSI is kind of a fun show.

I didn't have any scientific background when I came over here, so when I was watching those shows, I thought, "Oh that's neat. Oh, that's cool. I didn't know they could do that!" And then I came here and I asked them. "Do you do that?" "No, that's not real." [She laughs.] It was eye-opening to come over here and learn the real truth about it.

Thanks so much for your time, Yvette.

**Yvette:** You're welcome. ■





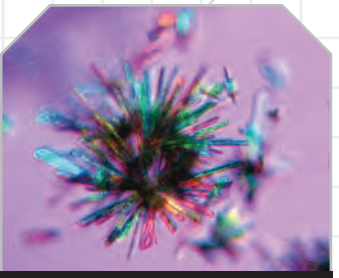

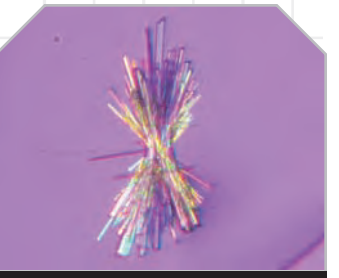
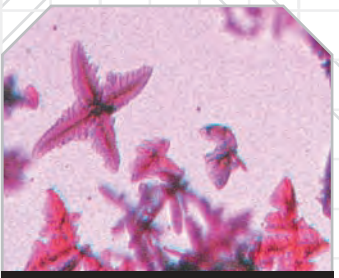
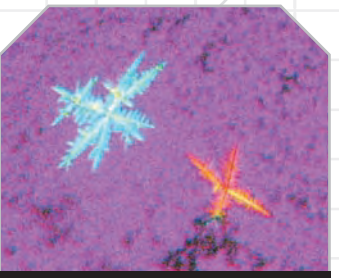
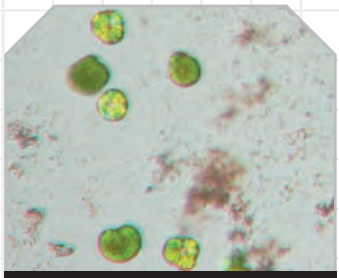
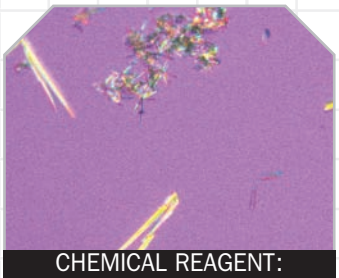
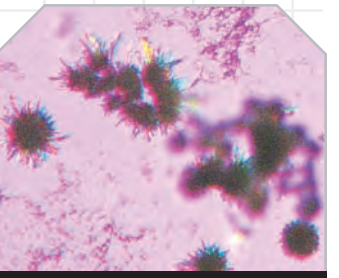
Club CEO John Hawkins and LAPD Commanding Officer Yvette Sanchez-Owens.



# Microcrystals: Telltale Signs

A big part of the narcotics analysis is the microcrystal process, where criminalists add a chemical reagent to an evidence sample. This isolates the substance and makes it easier to identify under a microscope.

Here are what various controlled substances look like after the chemical reagent has been applied.

PCP (Phencyclidine)	Cocaine	Heroin	Methamphetamine	Codeine
				
CHEMICAL REAGENT: potassium permanganate	CHEMICAL REAGENT: platinum chloride	CHEMICAL REAGENT: mercuric iodide	CHEMICAL REAGENT: picric acid	CHEMICAL REAGENT: potassium iodide
				
CHEMICAL REAGENT: potassium permanganate	CHEMICAL REAGENT: gold chloride	CHEMICAL REAGENT: mercuric chloride	CHEMICAL REAGENT: gold chloride in phosphoric acid	CHEMICAL REAGENT: marme

## Alive! Interview with Cherie Will

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30

police department, and then oftentimes for the prosecution of crimes by the City Attorney's office, or the District Attorney's office. And the more science evolves and is applied to the crime investigation, the more valuable the laboratory's work becomes.

People see *CSI* on television. What are the similarities and differences between what the LAPD lab does and what *CSI* does?

**Cherie:** I've never seen a narc lab in *CSI*. It's a program that I watched for a little while, but I just don't watch much television, so I don't watch *CSI* anymore.

They take a grain of truth, and they dramatize it for their audience. Most of their audience doesn't know that what's being shown to them is not actually something we can do. There's probably a pretty small portion of their audience that can really tell the difference. It looks good on television, but the fact is we just simply can't do most of what they do. It doesn't mean anything either way for us in the laboratory, because we know the difference.

But the people who don't know the difference, and have decision-making in the cases that we work on, are the jurors in the cases. They may think that something can happen because they've seen it on television, when in fact, when we testify in cases, they find that we couldn't do what they saw on television. They may think that we are not able to do what we *should* be able to do, when in fact what's shown on TV is something that's just not possible. And our detectives -- though they've learned over the years, as these shows have been on TV for what, five, ten years or so -- we've educated them in the fact that we can't necessarily do for their investigations what they're seeing on television. They're not as demanding as they used to be. But it's really the jurors. The prosecutors in some of these cases, when they pick their jurors, they want to know

whether they watch these shows, and what kind of an effect that's going to have on their decision-making. It's unfortunate, but there's really not much we can do about it, other than, you know, educate the public, and say that what they're presenting just simply is not the whole truth.

It's important work you do here.

**Cherie:** [Our criminalists] are doing very important work. There is very little room for error, and we have checks and rechecks of work to make sure that we send out only quality work. We really depend on the scientists whom we hire, and they insist, for their own personal integrity, that the work that they put out is only the best quality.

Cherie, thanks so much for taking the time to explain the lab to *Alive!* readers.

**Cherie:** You're welcome. ■



Supervising Criminalist Cherie Will in the lab.

## The Life of the Lab

The lab equipment is important, but absolutely essential to the success and efficiency of the narcotics lab is its personnel. *Alive!* thanks everyone in the narcotics lab for their assistance. Not pictured here are Criminalist Glenn Johnson, who was not in when we photographed the lab personnel, and Criminalist Veronica Chiquillo, who preferred to remain in the background.



Criminalist Marie Chance at the GCMS machine.



Criminalist Aletha Basconillo.



Criminalist Nand Hart-Nibbrig, talking to Club CEO John Hawkins.