



# Alive!



## Long-Term Care Insurance Has Rare Open Enrollment

Open enrollment for Long-Term Care insurance is coming this August.

**THE CLUB** — Everyone should have Long-Term Care insurance. And coming up Aug. 1 through Oct. 31, the Club will host an Open Enrollment period for Club Members to sign up! (DWP Club Members will have a Long-Term Care Open Enrollment next year.)

An open-enrollment period means that most of those who apply for this affordable product will be accepted. Don't miss the chance — the Club hasn't had an Open-Enrollment period for Long-Term Care insurance since 1999. Be sure to take advantage!

What is Long-Term Care Insurance? It's insurance that pays you \$1,000 to \$5,000 per month, depending on which plan you apply for. The policies pay you for up to four years (facility) or eight years (if the one covered is at home). Best of all, the policies pay you, unlike most reimbursement models.

The Club's Open-Enrollment Period for Long-Term Care insurance will take place Aug. 1-Oct. 31 for City employees; DWP Club Members will have their Open Enrollment next year. The Club will hold its first seminar about Long-Term Care this month.

**See the story on page 29, and talk to your Club Counselor. Don't miss this chance!**

## Finance Honors 6 For Outstanding Service to City

Finance honors top workers plus six individuals.

*Story by Yvonne Liu, Office of Finance*

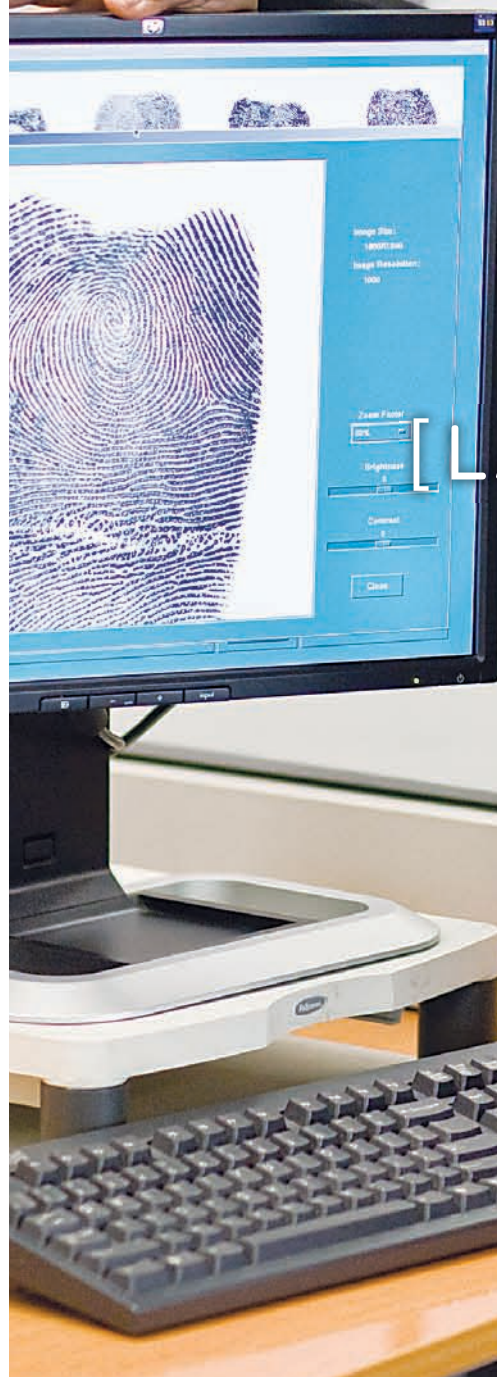
**FINANCE** — On June 10, the Office of Finance celebrated its eighth annual Outstanding Service Awards. Antoinette Christovale, Director of Finance, presented awards to six employees for their exceptional performance and dedication to the job, saying, "This year, four of our recipients have less than five years' experience with the Department. It gives me great pleasure to recognize the new talents among the veteran employees for their contribution and their ability to excel in a highly specialized field of City service."

The following six honorees were recognized for their service during fiscal year 2009-10 at levels above and beyond the normal duties of their jobs: Andrea Angeles, Personnel Analyst II; Mark Choi, Sr. Systems Analyst I; Bea Suga, Finance Collection Investigator II; Jovita Salazar, Tax Auditor II; Warren Sibille, Tax Compliance Officer II; and Elizabeth Salumbides, Tax Compliance Officer III.

**The Club congratulates all the winners. To read their stories, go to page 40.**

## Prints of the City

**The Latent Print Unit collects, analyzes and identifies thousands of fingerprints every year, helping keep the City safe. Read how they do it, starting on page 7.**



[LAPD Latent Print Unit]

Denise Williams, Principal Forensic Print Specialist and Officer in Charge of the Latent Print Unit, in the unit's space in Parker Center.



Photo by Tom Hawkins, Alive! photographer.



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## Open Enrollment! For Long-Term Care Insurance

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LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION  
Latent Print Unit



# Prints of the City

The Police Dept.'s Latent Print Unit seeks to identify the telltale smudges that criminals leave behind.

▶ On the following pages are a step-by-step explanation of how the Latent Print Unit conducts its business, and an interview with Denise Williams, Officer in Charge.

## LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION:

- Administration
- Quality Assurance
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- Serology/DNA
- Firearms
- ▶ Latent Print Unit
- Polygraphs
- Electronics
- Photography



Delonda Lewis, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member, during the Manual Comparison process.

Photo by Angel Gomez, Club Member Services Manager



## LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION

# ▶ Finding the Bad Guys

The Police Dept.'s Latent Print Unit seeks to identify the telltale smudges that criminals leave behind.



Photos by Angel Gomez, Club Member Services Director, and Tom Hawkins, Club Photographer

**C**riminals like to use their bare hands. But when they do, they're doomed.

That's the goal of the LAPD's Latent Print Unit, part of the Scientific Investigation Division. The unit is tasked with collecting, analyzing, identifying, verifying and testifying to fingerprints left behind at crime scenes.

Identifying fingerprints is a highly developed science. The Latent Print Unit conducts latent (hidden) fingerprint investigations for all types of crime scenes, from burglaries and stolen vehicles to bank robberies, rapes and murders. There are 78 Forensic Print Specialists with various levels of expertise who are assigned to this unit. Field responsibilities include processing crime scenes for latent prints, fingerprint-

ing dead bodies involved in homicides, and taking plaster casts of shoeprints and tire tracks. Analysis of the latent prints is conducted in the office. The latent prints are run through the Los Angeles Automated Fingerprint Identification System (LAFIS) to obtain possible matches, and Forensic Print Specialists manually compare suspect and victim finger and palm prints to crime scene prints. In some cases, crime scene evidence is chemically processed using sophisticated techniques to develop otherwise impossible-to-see latent prints.

All employees in the Latent Print Unit testify in court as to their findings.

The employees of the Latent Print Unit are dedicated servants of the City and they fully respect, support and assist its citizens and agencies. The Latent Print Unit is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and operates out of Parker Center, Van Nuys Community Police Station, and the Ahmanson Recruit Training Center in Westchester.

▶ On this and the following pages are a step-by-step explanation of how the Latent Print Unit conducts its business, and an interview with Denise Williams, Officer in Charge.

## The *Alive!* Interview

### The Latent Print Unit: A Unique Science

An Interview with Denise Williams, Principal Forensic Print Specialist

On April 13, *Alive!* editor John Burnes sat down with Denise Williams, Principal Forensic Print Specialist and the Officer in Charge of the LAPD's Latent Print Unit. The interview took place in her office on the second floor of the original Parker Center, which has largely been abandoned except for a few other functions, as most of the administration has moved to the new Police Building. —Ed.

**Alive!** Hi Denise, and thanks for sitting down with us today. We know you're busy. So, how did you get here?

**Denise Williams:** I've been in the field of fingerprints for more than 21 years. I was first introduced to fingerprints when I was in high school, actually.

How did that happen?

**Denise:** Remember the Regional Occupational Programs, called ROP, classes? They were classes geared to preparing students toward career opportunities. They offered Fingerprint Classification as one of the courses, so I took it. Every Saturday morning, for a full semester, I would come to the Los Angeles Police Department, Parker Center, where I'm currently working now, and learn about fingerprints. It was a great class and I loved classifying fingerprints, and I was good at it. It has been almost 30 years since, but I still remember my instructor's name: Mr. Howard Speaks. Mr. Speaks loved the science of fingerprints and loved teaching it. He would pick me and other students up from home so that our parents would not have to drive us downtown every Saturday morning. He passed away several

■ Identifying fingerprints involves meticulous methodology based upon the fact that no two fingerprints are exactly alike.

years ago, but he is the reason why so many of us choose this as a career. However, in high school I was not thinking about working at the time, so it wasn't until I saw the course offered at the City College that I was attending, that I took it more seriously and chose it as a career path.

How does this career affect you? Do you ever look at fingerprints that somebody leaves on your counter at home?

Denise Williams, Principal Forensic Print Specialist and the Officer in Charge of the LAPD's Latent Print Unit



**Denise:** All the time, and now that I have kids, I can see why they're not so easy to wipe off. When I used to go to tow yards to print vehicles, I would think, wow, these kids really put their fingerprints all over the car; how can the parents see out of the car? Now that's my car. I have three kids.

I'm constantly looking at fingerprints. When I go to stores and I pick up objects, I try not to leave my fingerprints on items because it can ultimately identify you. We touch and pick up items subconsciously at times and there's no way that you can remember when, where and why your fingerprints are found on a particular surface, location, and item.

Do you ever see something on a window and say, ooh that's a really interesting print, that's very unusual with the swirl or the way that it's formed or anything like that?

**Denise:** Yes, but most commonly I tell people how easy it would be to identify them because they have such good ridge detail.

#### A Meticulous Process

Can you give us a brief overview of the Latent Print Unit?

**Denise:** Okay. The first element of our job is field investigations. We receive requests from officers investigating scenes. For example, a victim calls 911 to report a crime (burglary, robbery, homicide), when the Investigating Officer (I/O) arrives at the scene, he/she assess the scene in order to ascertain if there are any surfaces or areas that may have been touched by the suspect. The I/O will then notify our unit to respond. After receiving the request, a field unit is dispatched within the first 24 hours.

The Department has 21 area divisions, so it's fairly large. We have three offices that we respond to crime scenes from.

Each field unit is equipped with a print kit. The kit consists of various latent print powders, brushes, lifting cards, and tape. Specialists apply the various print powders to non-porous surfaces in order to make visible any friction ridge detail, left



[LAPD Latent Print Unit]

[step-by-step guide]

# Collecting Fingerprints

Here's how the Latent Print Unit collects and analyzes fingerprints.

## STEP 1: The Field Unit

When there's been a crime, the officers or detectives on the scene call the Latent Print Unit to come and collect evidence. That's when the Latent Print Unit kicks into gear.

Latent Print Unit personnel assigned to field detail respond to crime scene investigations from three locations: Parker Center (Downtown L.A.), West Los Angeles (near the airport), and the San Fernando Valley. This detail operates 24 hours, 7 days a week, conducting crime scene investigations on crimes ranging from burglary and motor vehicles to homicides and rapes. Forensic Print Specialists (FPSs) utilize specialized fingerprint powders and brushes to develop and recover latent (hidden) finger and palm print evidence left at crime scenes. The field detail responds to approximately 25,000 field investigations annually.



1 **1** *Alert editor John Barnes leaves his prints at the scene of the "crime" - actually just the LAPD's Piper Tech Print Shed training area, for demonstration purposes.*



2 **2** *Forensic Print Specialist III Jerome Friez prepares his field kit before going to a "crime scene."*



3 **3** *Jerome Friez prepares to collect evidence at the scene.*



4 **4** *Dusting the area.*



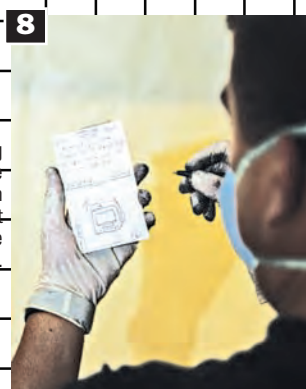
5 **5** *Highlighting, for better visual identification.*



6 **6** *Removing the print tape and lifting the fingerprint evidence slowly and carefully.*



7 **7** *Placing the evidence on an index card.*



8 **8** *Annotating the evidence card with important details of the discovery.*

## Latent Print Unit: The Team

### LAFIS (Los Angeles Automated Fingerprint Identification System) Section



FROM LEFT: Alex Reutita, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; Tonica Houston, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; Jennifer Keir, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; Arthur Gerio, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; and Ren Capati, Forensic Print Specialist III.

### Manual Comparison Section



FRONT, FROM LEFT: Bobby Salonga, Acting Sr. Forensic Print Specialist; Delonda Lewis, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; and Yolanda Reyes, Forensic Print Specialist II. BACK: David Velarde, Forensic Print Specialist III; Tony Ortiz, Forensic Print Specialist III; and Jeff Deacon, Forensic Print Specialist III.

### Latent Print Unit Administrative Section



FROM LEFT: Bobby Salonga, Acting Sr. Forensic Print Specialist; Gina Cronin, Sr. Forensic Print Specialist, Club Member; Christine Tucker, Forensic Print Specialist IV; Denise Williams, Officer in Charge; and Michellé Harvey, Acting Sr. Forensic Print Specialist.

### Chemical Processing Detail



FROM LEFT: Melissa Popovic, Sr. Forensic Print Specialist/Supervisor; Larklyn Watts, Forensic Print Specialist III, Club Member; and Allan Villacorte, Forensic Print Specialist.

-CONTINUES NEXT PAGE



## LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION

## [step-by-step guide]

## STEP 2:

## Analyzing With Eyes and Computers



ABOVE: Forensic Print Specialist III Caron Moritz (seated) identifies minutia (unique characteristics) in a fingerprint she has scanned from an evidence card. Officer in Charge Denise Williams looks on.



RIGHT: The evidence with marked minutia (left side of computer monitor) has been run through the LAFIS database (by Forensic Print Specialist III Caron Moritz, seated), and the database returns a possible positive identification (right side of computer monitor). Officer in Charge Denise Williams and *Alive!* editor John Burnes look on.

Once the latent print evidence card is received at the lab, the evidence is processed through LAFIS (see below) – a countywide fingerprint database – by scanning the image into the database and plotting the individual characteristics (minutia) of the finger and or palm print impression. The computer system uses this arrangement and position of the various minutia to search the records within the database. Upon the completion of the search, the system provides a list of possible candidates whom minutia arrangement is in close proximity to that of the latent print evidence. A Forensic Print Specialist (FPS) is responsible for examining the candidate list for possible matches. If a possible match is determined, the FPS forwards this information to the Manual Comparison Detail, to conduct a side-by-side comparison of the latent print (the evidence, or unknown source) to the arrest record identified through LAFIS (a known source in the database).

The Los Angeles Automated Fingerprint Identification System (LAFIS) is a shared database within Los Angeles County that houses all Los Angeles County booking arrestee's fingers and palm print cards. The database houses over 12 million finger and palm print records. The Los Angeles Police Department's Latent Print Unit utilizes LAFIS, to conduct searches of latent print evidence retrieved from crime scenes to criminal arrest records within the database. Last year the latent print unit conducted over 17,000 latent fingerprint and palm print searches.

### Alive! Interview with Denise Williams

– CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

behind. If friction ridge develops, the specialist will then recover the latent print evidence by placing the lifting tape over the developed ridge detail, extracting it from its surface, and apply the tape onto the evidence card. Now you have physical evidence that can be transferred back to the office for further analysis. On the back of the evidence card, specialists must document the location, where the evidence was obtained from, a drawing of the item or surface the evidence was retrieved from, date and time of processing, along with victim/s name, etc. This information is necessary when testifying in court. Once all documentation and investigation reports have been completed, the package is then brought down to the main office here at Parker Center. All Latent Print Unit evidence is retained by the unit and is not checked into a property room facility.

How many field investigations do you perform?

**Denise:** Just more than 200 hundred calls a month, 25,000 field investigations annually.

Wow.

**Denise:** The LAPD is very big, so it keeps us busy.

Twenty-four seven?

**Denise:** Yes, we're a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week operation here at the main lab, but the two satellite locations operate daily between the hours of 0700 to 1100 hours. Field requests after that time are handled by the unit's a.m. watch personnel here at the main office. Typically callouts during this shift are officers standing by crime scenes.

Before evidence is processed to identify persons of interest who may have committed the crime, the evidence is first compared against the victim's fingers and palm print to eliminate those lift cards from further processing. A lot of times, [we find] prints belonging to the victims because they touch these same items every day. Once the victim's prints have been eliminated, the remaining lifts are processed through the Los Angeles Automated Fingerprint Identification System (LAFIS). LAFIS is a computer database that contains all Los Angeles County booking arrests. Whenever someone is arrested and booked, their prints and photos are taken and uploaded into the system. It is a criminal database. So when we run the prints that we recover from a field investigation through the database, we're running it through a criminal database.

And that's the county.

**Denise:** The county's database, yes. Los Angeles County. Once we scan that evidence into the computer, we mark the characteristics of the print – the ending ridges and bifurcations.

The unique ...

**Denise:** ... the unique things in a fingerprint that we use to make our identification. We're marking them because we're telling the computer that we want it to search this print with these characteristics, located in this position.

Got it.

**Denise:** Then the computer searches the database for potential matches. An examiner then reviews the candidate list [produced by the computer] and can tell, looking at the evidence, which prints are similar and need to be analyzed further. Then that case is given to our analysts who work the manual comparison detail. The analyst who's assigned to the manual comparison detail will obtain the case evidence package along with the possible LAFIS candidate booking finger- and palm prints, and conduct a side-by-side manual comparison. If the analyst finds that the two prints match, two additional analysts will conduct an individual analysis to verify the findings.

I see.

**Denise:** It is the Latent Print Unit's policy that all identifications be confirmed by three analysts. A report is generated and signed by all the analysts and forwarded to a supervisor/lead to conduct an administrative review. The completed, signed report is mailed to the assigned investigating officers.

How long does that take?

**Denise:** I make it sound like it's a smooth transition. But that process can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks, depending on the complexity of the latent print evidence.

And then, after you verify it, there's an administrative review?

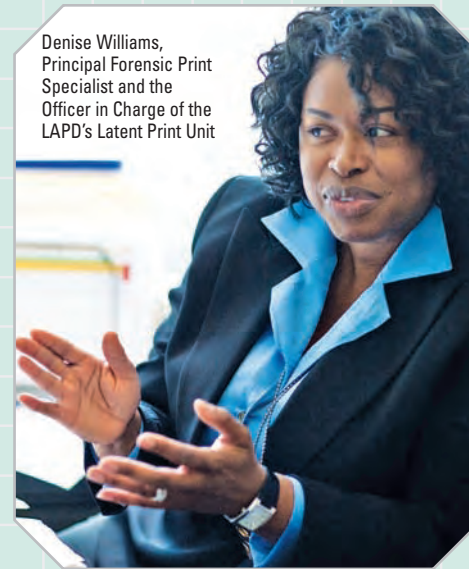
**Denise:** Yes. The identification report is generated, but before it's mailed out to a detective, it is reviewed. We have an administrative review, making sure that everything is complete and accurate. Doing the administrative review is making sure that all the paperwork and all the numbers are correct and everyone signs where they are supposed to sign, before we mail it off to the detective.

That document that you mail off is a pretty important document.

**Denise:** Yes. This is the document that will be referred to in court and will be given to the defense side as well.

Scrutinized and questioned and poked and prodded to make sure that it stands up.

**Denise:** Exactly.



And if it would go to trial, you might be involved in the testimony.

**Denise:** Yes, daily we are called to court to provide expert testimony on Latent Print Unit evidence.

### A Unique Calling Card

Are fingerprints genetic? Unique traits and ridge lines and markings, can they be passed on? If you saw a print that might be hitting very close to a certain individual, maybe you might want to go back a generation to see whether or not there's a closer match to a father or mother?

**Denise:** I'm not going to say that it's not completely genetic. Of course some genetics play a part. But the reason why prints are so unique is because there are other things that are happening when the friction ridge is developing in the womb. Research into the development of friction-ridge skin has shown ridge formation developing on the fetus at approximately 120 days after conception.

It has a lot to do with the embryonic sac that the fetus is growing in and the pressure in the space. When the volar pads – the pads underneath the fingerprints – start to develop, the ridge detail begins forming and starts moving across the fingers, hands, toes or feet. The physical activity and nutrition of the mother play a part in the growth factor of everything happening in the fetus. That's why everything is different.

Everything is unique when it comes to fingerprints, even twins. Twins share the same sac, but they don't share the same growth pattern.

So each twin has a unique fingerprint.

**Denise:** Yes. Each finger is different; each palm is different. Your joints are different. You don't have "friction skin" on your hand and sole of your feet that is the same.

Even on your own hand.

**Denise:** Even on your own hand or your toe.

That's pretty amazing.

**Denise:** It is.

### The Science of Fingerprinting

How has the science of fingerprinting developed over time?

**Denise:** Fingerprint identifications have been in use for more than 100 years. The only new thing when it comes to fingerprints is automation, because none of us could have imagined that a computer database would be able to get us possible candidates as close as it does.

When did that come about?

**Denise:** Los Angeles County received the first automated fingerprint identification system [AFIS] in 1983 or '84. The class I took in school was still teaching the Henry Classification, which was a fingerprint filing sequence to locate a fingerprint card. By the time I was hired, the County had already received its first AFIS system and was no longer classifying fingerprints using the Henry Classification system.

How much did that improve the workflow?

**Denise:** Oh, my, I would say by 100 percent. We are able to run cases through the database and get a result in five to ten to ten minutes. Before the AFIS system, we would have to manually classify each finger using the Henry Classification code and then manually search files for that code.



[step-by-step guide]

**STEP 3:**

**Manual Comparison**

After the initial LAFIS analysis is completed and if a suspect candidate has been generated, the evidence, including the suspect candidate's ten-print card copies (known prints), are given to a second analyst to begin the manual comparison examination. Manual Comparison is an additional sub-discipline within the Latent Print Unit.

Personnel assigned to this detail are responsible for comparing the "unknown" latent print evidence gathered from crime scenes to the "known" prints of persons of interest. Analysts use a scientific methodology (process) termed ACE-V to compare unknown latent prints to known finger, palm or footprints. ACE-V is an acronym for the description of the process utilized in conducting manual latent print comparisons. It stands for



Delonda Lewis, Forensic Print Specialist III, during the Manual Comparison process.

analysis, comparison, evaluation and verification. The four-phase process employs guidelines and procedures, during each phase, to assure that results of the comparison are obtained in an objective and reliable manner.

Here's a summary of each phase of manual comparison:

- **Analysis:** An analysis is conducted of the "unknown" impression (evidence), looking for pattern types, specific friction ridge formations and the spatial relationship of the various characteristics that make up the friction ridge skin (commonly termed "minutia"). There are basic types of characteristics: bifurcations (or the splitting of a single ridge into two ridges); ridge endings (the point at which a ridge ends) and dots.
- **Comparison:** If the clarity and content are sufficient, the latent print impression (unknown evidence) is then compared to the friction ridge skin impressions of exemplar (known impression). As stated previously, the known impressions are compiled in the LAFIS database and are printed out by the LAFIS analyst.
- **Evaluation:** If there is sufficient agreement between the unknown and known impressions, an individualization is the result. If not, the analysis outcome is: no identification.

After verification (see next), the results of the manual comparison are documented in a report that is then forwarded to detectives, and may be used by as evidence in court.

**STEP 4:**

**Verification**

The analysis, comparison and evaluation are then submitted to a second qualified examiner for verification. The second examiner will conduct another analysis, comparison and evaluation of the latent print impression and will either validate or disagree with the first examiner's conclusion.



**STEP 5:**

**Chemical Processing**



1 Larklyn Watts, Forensic Print Specialist III, opens the evidence packet and removes the evidence, in this case, a prop/nonfunctional handgun.

The Chemical Processing Detail utilizes alternative methods consisting of chemical washes and alternative light sources to develop latent prints on evidence booked into custody. Chemical processing of evidence is conducted in a controlled laboratory setting. It is used for any evidence that "can't be traditionally processed," according to Chemical Lab Supervisor Melissa Popovic, Sr. Forensic Print Specialist. If a print can't be removed via dusting and tape, it's brought here to be processed via chemicals and light sources, and then photographed.

The Chemical Processing Detail is housed in a laboratory at the Hertzberg Forensic Science Center on the campus of Cal State Los Angeles.



4 A fingerprint is found.



2 Special chemicals are applied to the weapon to develop possible latent print impression evidence that was left behind.



The prop handgun is dried during Chemical Processing



5 A photograph is taken.



3 After the chemical wash, the weapon is viewed with special lighting to locate any latent print evidence.



6 Allan Villacorte, Forensic Print Specialist III, enters information into the case file.

—CONTINUES NEXT PAGE



## LAPD SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION DIVISION

## [step-by-step guide]

## STEP 6:

## Administrative Review

After the evidence goes through the LAFIS process, the manual comparison process and then a third verification, an administrator reviews all conclusions, signs the documents and forwards them to the original requester, usually either a court representative or a detective on the particular case.



Bobby Salonga, Acting Sr. Forensic Print Specialist, performs a final administrative review of the conclusions.

## STEP 7:

## Testifying

Forensic Print Specialists (FPSs) are subpoenaed to testify as expert witnesses, by either the offices of the District Attorney or the Public Defender. The FPS will testify to their education level, training, work experience and involvement (field investigation, chemical processing, LAFIS, and manual comparison) in the particular case. Many court cases may require expert testimony from multiple FPSs from the different Latent Print Unit sub-disciplines.



## ▶ Thank You!

*Alive!* thanks everyone at the Latent Print Unit for their assistance in producing this article, including: Denise Williams, Melissa Popovic, Glenn Cabrera and all the Forensic Print Specialists and administrators in the Latent Print Unit.

### *Alive!* Interview with Denise Williams

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#### The Henry Code?

**Denise:** Yes, named after one of the first pioneers who discovered that fingerprints were unique and could identify people. The Henry Classification required the ridge count and trace of each finger. The classification was converted into a numerical and alpha formula, which was called the Henry Classification system. The formula was used to search and locate fingerprint cards in the file. You could have hundreds of people with the same formula, but the fingerprints were not the same. So you'd find yourself looking for this formula and then looking for the ridge characteristics to see if they were the same. Automation did away with all that. We just scan the fingerprint into the database and [after the unique markings have been highlighted] it searches.

Before automation, we conducted our identifications based only on leads that the detectives had given us. The detective had to walk in with the request for us to compare it [to another print specifically], because if we didn't have all ten prints to do our Henry Classification and to come up with a formula, we wouldn't know where to search. Detectives had to give us the lead, [saying] compare this one print that you got from the crime scene with this guy.

#### But not anymore.

**Denise:** Not anymore. We can take that one latent and run it through the database, and the system will search for a match.

#### Right, but as far as actual analysis goes ...

**Denise:** As far as doing the actual comparison and identification of friction-ridged skin, that has not changed over time. It's applying a scientific methodology to determine whether or not a fingerprint originated from the same source. It's looking at pattern type. It's looking at ridge flow. It's looking at those characteristics, seeing if they are located in the same space or relative position. This process has been used for more than 100 years to prove that fingerprints were permanent and unique. It's the same process that we apply today when we're making identification. We're constantly retesting the hypothesis, whether or not these two prints are the same.

#### Right. What does "latent" mean in this context?

**Denise:** A latent print is a print left on an item or surface, and most of the time not visible to the naked eye. The word "latent" means hidden, undeveloped but capable of development. We use different types of forensic powder (depending on the type of the surface) or chemical to develop the latent print to be visible to the naked eye.

Do you access any databases other than the county's?

**Denise:** We typically used the Dept. of Justice and FBI databases when our search to the LACRIS database comes back with negative results. And these are usually done with more serious crimes and upon request by the investigating officers or detectives.

#### How successful are you?

**Denise:** Our hit ratio within the county is much higher than any other database; we have greater success within our own criminal database. Of all the cases we run through the database, we obtain hits on approximately 40 percent.



Denise Williams, Principal Forensic Print Specialist and the Officer in Charge of the LAPD's Latent Print Unit

There's a strong possibility of a positive match on 40 percent of the cases you run through the database?

**Denise:** Exactly.

#### That's pretty amazing.

**Denise:** Yes, it is.

#### Analyzing fingerprints — is it hard?

**Denise:** Depending on the complexity of the evidence, the analysis could be difficult.

Does it take a special kind of person to do this kind of work?

**Denise:** I would say so. [She laughs.] The work is very tedious.

#### You have to be meticulous.

**Denise:** Yes, you have to be very meticulous and you have to enjoy what you're doing. But you have to get some type of gratification from knowing that you helped or assisted in solving a crime. You have to be able to feed off of that.

### Management Challenges

What challenges do you see for your department here? What's making it hard to do this?

**Denise:** Money, lack thereof. This is the issue all over. We're one of the largest agencies in the world as far as what we do. We're one of the largest labs in the world. And what's making it difficult is that we've been operating in an office environment [at Parker Center], not a laboratory environment because, frankly, there hasn't been any money to give us what we need.

We've had to separate our work details, not just because it works better for us to respond quicker in the field, but because there's no office space available for us to operate out of. It wasn't till recently, until this building [Parker Center] was vacated, that we were able to move to the same floor.

#### To move together.

**Denise:** Yes. Just in February. That's been one of the biggest challenges. We've increased in size — almost doubled — over the last 10 years, and we're still occupying the same space as when we were 25 years ago.

And space that wasn't really built for you even then.

**Denise:** Exactly. We're responding to more crime scenes than we have enough analysts to process. So we need to hire more people. We need more supervisors to oversee the functions, but we haven't been able to do that because there hasn't been any money. And now, recently since this budget crisis with the City, we have about 15 to 16 vacancies right now from our analytical area. By the end of this year, you can add another five to that, because although we've been exempted from the early retirement incentive program, we have about 20 percent of our personnel that are scheduled to retire within the next few years anyway. This year alone, we've already lost four people to retirement.

#### And the furloughs?

**Denise:** We've been on two days of work furloughs a month. So we've lost ten percent of our staff to work furloughs, and we can't do anything about that. That's hindering us quite a bit in performing our job efficiently.

#### Are you backlogged?

**Denise:** We're backlogged.

### Prime Time vs. Reality

How different is the reality here than what people see on television?

**Denise:** I guarantee you we do not drive Hummers! [She laughs.] It's quite different. When you look at the CSI shows, you see crime scenes solved in less than 24 hours. The reality of it is, there's a lot more detail that goes into what we do. There are so many more elements that you don't get a chance to see when you see it on television. That's Hollywood.

Also, we don't work in contact that much with the detectives. We're very unbiased when we go out to the site. We go and get the evidence. We come back and we process the evidence. We mail off our results and, a lot of times, we don't know what happens with the case. We don't even know if what we did really helped in the investigation. We may get a subpoena to go to court. But we're kind of like a silent partner. We have no idea what's going on with the case until it's time for us to go to court or if we receive a commendation. But on CSI, you see everyone working together.

You're not out there turning the screws on bad people.

**Denise:** No. Detectives do their investigation. We're the support services. We do our investigation. We mail them our results and that's it.

#### You do science.

**Denise:** We try to make identification to the evidence. A lot of times, we might end up exonerating someone or providing detectives with witnesses who are afraid to come forward. But their fingerprints were at a scene. From what I understand, it happens quite often.

### Good People

How good are your people here?

**Denise:** We have great people working here because our work volume is so high. We have some of the best analysts here because they're constantly working on cases. They're constantly doing the job. Repetition gains experience and knowledge, and that's what you get when you're constantly looking at case after case. So we have some of the best analysts.

#### And generally happy.

**Denise:** For the most part it is, and it's a gratifying job.

Thanks, Denise, for your time.

**Denise:** You're welcome. ■