

The Crime Stoppers Story

By Greg MacAleese

The two criminals who shot down Michael Carmen at his gas station in July, 1976, didn't realize that they would be responsible for a world-wide anti-crime movement that has resulted in the solution of more than 425,000 major crimes.

They didn't realize that as a result of their cold-blooded killing more than 75,000 criminals would find themselves behind bars.

Nor did they realize that their crime would become the model of two major television network shows.

No, the two criminals who shot Michael Carmen at point-blank range with a .12-gauge shotgun did not realize that their crime would serve as the catalyst for the creation of **Crime Stoppers**.

Michael Carmen was a young University of New Mexico student who was working at a small gas station in Albuquerque's Northeast Heights in July, 1976. He was only two weeks away from marrying his high school sweetheart. On the night he was killed, he was working an extra shift because one of his friends needed the night off.

On that fateful Friday night, two men robbed Michael's gas station and then - for no apparent reason - fired a shotgun blast from less than 10 feet into his abdomen. Remarkably, Michael lived for more than four hours after the shooting. Several times he tried to tell detectives who it was who shot him but he didn't have the strength. He died on the operating table without being able to make a dying declaration.

I was one of the detectives working that case. The murder seemed so senseless at the time. It still remains senseless today.

But I told Michael Carmen's mother that we would bring his killers to justice. And yet, after six weeks of trying to piece evidence together to solve the murder, we were no closer to a solution than we were the night he was killed.

First Reenactment

It was really out of desperation that I approached Max Sklower, then general manager of KOAT-TV in Albuquerque, and asked him if we could reenact the crime for one of his newscasts.

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My reasoning for reenacting the crime was simple. I felt we had an eyewitness to Michael Carmen's murder somewhere in the community. But how was I going to reach out in a city of some 350,000 people and pluck out an eyewitness?

The only logical approach was to get the media to do it for me. Then it came to me that if we reenacted the crime, we might be able to trigger the memory of a potential eyewitness, someone who might have seen part of the crime committed but not understood what he or she was witnessing.

It did not take much of a sales job to convince Max Sklower to broadcast a reenactment of Michael Carmen's killing on KOAT. He quickly agreed.

On September 8, 1976, the first crime reenactment was broadcast on KOAT-TV's 10 o'clock news. The next morning I received a call from a young man who told me that he had watched the reenactment on television. He said he remembered walking home from a party on the night Michael Carmen was killed and that he had heard a loud bang, almost like the noise made by a large firecracker.

He said shortly after the blast, a car heading west from the gas station passed him at high speed. The caller said there were two men inside the vehicle, but that he couldn't recognize them. But, he added, he thought he had seen the car before and that it belonged to a resident in a nearby apartment complex.

The caller's information was the missing link we needed to solve Michael Carmen's murder. By finding the killers' getaway vehicle, we were able to trace it back to one of the two gunmen.

The second offender was caught a short time later. It took us just 72 hours to solve Michael Carmen's murder, once we had received the caller's tip. Six other armed robberies were also solved as the result of our investigation.

Birth of Crime Stoppers

As a result of the success of our first televised reenactment, I was able to convince the Albuquerque Police Department that we needed this kind of program on a regular basis.

I knew that most major crimes were solved not by brilliant investigation on the part of police, but as a direct result of information provided by the public. However, many citizens were reluctant to provide this information for two reasons - fear and apathy.

So I designed Crime Stoppers to overcome these two barriers. For those people who were afraid of retaliation from the criminal element, I created a system that would allow callers to Crime Stoppers to remain completely anonymous. And for those citizens who were apathetic, I established a system that would provide cash rewards for information leading to the solution of a major crime.

Board of Directors

The Crime Stoppers concept appeared very sound. But I needed several elements to carry it out. First, I knew the idea of offering cash rewards and anonymity to citizens would be somewhat controversial. There was certainly potential for abuse. So in order to provide civilian oversight of the program, I established a citizen board of directors.

We selected 24 citizens to serve on that first board. They came from all segments of our community. The first person I recruited was Carl Jones, head of security for the Circle-K Corporation. Carl had heard a speech I made about the program to the Chamber of Commerce and approached me afterward. He said he thought it was an excellent idea and asked if I would like some help putting the board together. I quickly said yes.

That moment might have been the luckiest in the history of Crime Stoppers because Carl Jones turned out to be a powerful advocate for the program.

Quiet and unassuming, Carl worked tirelessly on behalf of Crime Stoppers. We mapped out a plan for who should be on the original board. We needed a lawyer. We recruited Coleman Tily, a retired corporate attorney for RCA, who eventually became a driving force in the expansion of Crime Stoppers. We needed a representative from the business community. We recruited Ralph Burch from the Chamber of Commerce. We needed some experienced volunteers. We recruited Karen Pharris and Jan McCauley from the Junior League. We needed someone to make the payoffs. We found Arnie Olson and his dry cleaning store.

And so it went . . . housewives, retired persons, professionals . . . all working for a common goal. To make Crime Stoppers successful.

Since then, more than 100,000 persons have devoted thousands of hours of volunteer time to serve on the Boards of Directors of Crime Stoppers programs around the world.

The board is responsible for monitoring the Crime Stoppers operation. They also raise the reward fund and meet monthly to determine what reward amounts callers should receive. It is a demanding task for volunteers, but the success of Crime Stoppers testifies to the incredible job performed by these boards.

The Media

Second, I believed the program needed high visibility. My goal was to make Crime Stoppers into a household word. To accomplish this, I knew we would need the support of the media.

But what would be the most effective form of publicity for Crime Stoppers? The answer was obvious. Each week we would publicize an unsolved crime and offer a cash reward for information leading to the solution of the case. And since we had already reenacted a crime for television and solved it through a citizen's tip, why not continue the process each week?

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The support of the media has ultimately been critical to the success of Crime Stoppers programs around the world.

If you could visualize a success cycle for Crime Stoppers, it would begin with the public awareness created by the media. We clearly tell the public how they can assist Crime Stoppers - by providing information about unsolved crimes and by donating money to our reward fund.

The awareness created by the media produces a response from the public - calls to Crime Stoppers and donations to the reward fund.

The response produces results - cases being solved by Crime Stoppers and rewards being paid.

And those results are then publicized by the media, which creates more awareness, more response and more results.

Back in 1976, I wasn't sure what kind of cooperation I might get from Albuquerque's media. After all, the city had one of the nation's highest per capita crime rates in those days and the media had taken the Albuquerque Police Department to task for our seeming inability to stem the rise in crimes.

However, when I approached the local newspapers, radio stations and the television stations in Albuquerque, I was pleasantly surprised to find almost unanimous support for the Crime Stoppers concept.

Every radio station in town said they would broadcast the "Crime of the Week" - first as a news item every Monday morning and then as 60-second Public Service Announcements during the rest of the week.

In addition to KOAT, Albuquerque's other two television stations - KGGM and KOB - both agreed to broadcast the "Crime of the Week" on their Monday evening newscasts. While neither one of the stations wanted to air a reenactment of the crime-that was KOAT's purview - they were interested in having their reporters go out to the crime scene and interview the Crime Stoppers coordinator or the detectives who originally investigated the case.

And Ralph Looney, editor of the *Albuquerque Tribune*, New Mexico's largest afternoon newspaper, pledged to put Crime Stoppers on the front page of his paper every Monday.

With that kind of media support, how could Crime Stoppers lose?

The answer was, we couldn't.

Initial Successes

The records of Albuquerque Crime Stoppers show that the first official call to the program was received at 0845 hours on September 9, 1976. The call had nothing to do with the reenactment of the Michael Carmen killing.

No, caller 001 said he had information on a gang rape which had occurred a year earlier, It seemed that a young woman had developed car trouble in downtown Albuquerque. A carload of men had driven by and stopped to offer help. They said they would take her to a service station. But when the woman got into the vehicle, the men took her to a nearby park where they gang raped her.

The caller had information about one of the offenders. It was a family member and the caller explained that he had been troubled with the knowledge of the crime for almost a year and Crime Stoppers offered him an opportunity to finally do something positive about the situation.

When the suspect's name was given to the detective working the case, she said she wasn't sure the victim would be able to identify any of the offenders because of the trauma she had experienced. But the detective followed up on the information and discovered that the suspect was working at a local bar. Together with the victim, they went to the bar on a Friday night. When the victim saw the suspect, she immediately identified him as one of the three men who had raped her. The detective was able to make the arrest the following week. The suspect entered a guilty plea. The two other offenders were eventually arrested and convicted in the case.

Success came that quick.

And it didn't stop. The second "Crime of the Week" involved a series of rapes. Over a four month period, 13 women had been abducted from the Winrock Shopping Center in Albuquerque by an armed rapist. The offender would follow the women out to their vehicles and as they were getting into their cars, he would approach them with a pistol, force them over to the passenger side of the car and then drove them out to deserted area of the city where he would disrobe and rape them. He then would order the victims out of the vehicles and leave them stranded while he drove back to the shopping center and abandoned the cars.

As you can guess, having this many victims abducted and raped from one shopping center over a concentrated period of time had created tremendous pressure on the police department to catch the offender. And yet everything we had tried to do to apprehend the suspect had failed. We had tried surveillance from the tops of the stores. We had tried roving patrols through the parking lots. We had put our police airplane over the shopping center with such frequency that the pilot began to complain of myopia because of the tight circles he had to fly! We even had one of our police women act as a decoy to see if she could lure the suspect out into the open.

Nothing.

Until October 2, 1976. That's when the saga of the "Winrock Rapist" came to an end. We decided that we would reenact one of the abductions/rapes as our "Crime of the Week." We also had a sketch of the suspect, drawn by one of his victims who happened to be a graphic artist, appear on the front page of the *Albuquerque Tribune*. The first issue of the *Tribune* was sold on the street beginning at 12:30 p.m. At 3:20 p.m., Caller #23 contacted Crime Stoppers. In an excited voice, he said he had just seen the front page of the *Tribune* and that he knew whose likeness had been sketched by the rape victim.

He said the suspect was Kevin Baker, that he was 22 years old, and that his mother worked at one of the stores at the shopping center. The detectives working the "Winrock Rapist" task force quickly checked out the tip. They discovered that Baker had a prior arrest for possession of marijuana. We had his mug shot and fingerprints! When we put together a photo lineup with Kevin Baker's picture in it, the victims immediately identified him as the offender.

By 4:45 p.m., we had enough probable cause to generate a search warrant. At 6:30 p.m., we executed the search warrant at Kevin Baker's home. We found clothing and credit cards belonging to the victims, a .357 magnum pistol matching the description of the weapon used by the rapist and clothing worn by the offender when he attacked his victims.

Four months later, Kevin Baker entered a guilty plea to ten of the rapes. He received 360 years in prison.

We began to think that Crime Stoppers was invincible. It wasn't.

The First Court Challenge

In October, 1976, Crime Stoppers almost came to a premature end. It began innocently enough. In mid-October, a drug dealer named James Garcia was murdered. About 12 hours after we found Garcia's bullet-riddled body, I received a call on the Crime Stoppers line.

The caller said he had witnessed Garcia's murder. He said the killing was also witnessed by at least eight other people. The killer, he said, was an ex-con named Charlie McGuinness. I asked the caller if he would be willing to testify, since he was an eyewitness. He laughed and said that he was interested in living. But then he proceeded to provide me with the names of the other eyewitnesses!

Det. Joe Garcia, who was assigned to the investigation, joined me in hauling in the eyewitnesses to be interviewed. One of them, who was wanted on some felony warrants, agreed to cooperate. The witness detailed how McGuinness and the victim had been having a feud over payment of a heroin shipment. The victim had spread word around Albuquerque that McGuinness was a rip-off artist who should be avoided by other heroin dealers. When

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McGuinness found his sources of heroin dwindling, he tracked down James Garcia and shot him six times point-blank in the face with a .9 mm pistol.

We asked the witness who else had seen Garcia's murder. The witness gave us the names of eight other people - including a person who obviously was our Crime Stoppers informant !

Based on the information provided by both the eyewitness and our Crime Stoppers tipster, we developed a search warrant and executed it at Charlie McGuinness' home. We recovered some blood-stained pants and a shirt, but the murder weapon was not found.

I've got to admit, I've seen stronger cases in my time. But that was all we had - one very scared eyewitness who was willing to work off his charges by going before the Grand Jury to testify about the case, one quasi-anonymous Crime Stoppers tipster and some blood-stained clothes. Still, this was enough to convince the Grand Jury to indict Charlie McGuinness for the murder of James Garcia.

We made arrangements to pay Crime Stoppers tipster #098 a total of \$250 in reward money. When I talked to #098, I told him how our reward payments were usually being made - with the informant going to our treasurer's place of business to receive payment in cash. But #098 had other ideas. He wanted the payment to be made by me at the police station!

And that's exactly how it happened. The informant met me in the men's rest room at the Albuquerque Police station and received his reward money. Then he did something that was even more incredible. He told me who he was.

'You already know who I am, don't you?' he asked. When I said I didn't know for sure and really didn't want to know, he said, 'Well, you know I'm Bernie.'

Christmas in Jail - Almost

His statement almost cost me Christmas in jail.

Here's what happened.

In early December, Charlie McGuinness' attorney filed a motion for discovery. Unknown to us at the time, our eyewitness to the murder-the same one who had testified before the Grand Jury had suddenly become very fearful for his life and had disappeared. This left us with just our Crime Stoppers tipster as the thin thread between a weak case and no case at all.

When Det. Garcia and I were subpoenaed to appear in District Court Judge Jerald Fowle's courtroom on the discovery motion, we knew we might be asked to identify our Crime Stoppers tipster. I realized that if we revealed the tipster's name we would destroy the credibility of Crime Stoppers. So we decided that we would refuse to give up our informant, even if it meant going to jail.

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Just two weeks before Christmas, I appeared in Judge Fowlie's courtroom. The attorney for McGuinness asked me a series of questions about Crime Stoppers and how it worked. He asked me if we had paid an informant in the McGuinness case. I said we had. He asked me if I had made the payoff. I said I had.

Then he asked me to describe the informant. I took a deep breath and refused. He then asked if I knew who the informant was. I said I did but that I would not reveal the name of the tipster. The defense attorney asked Judge Fowlie to instruct me to answer the questions. Visions of a jail cell danced in my head. But instead of ruling immediately, Judge Fowlie said he would take the matter under advisement.

For almost two weeks we didn't hear anything from Judge Fowlie. While he was reviewing the case and the issues involving our Crime Stoppers tipster, the local media were exhorting Judge Fowlie to rule in our favor. The *Albuquerque Tribune* printed a lengthy editorial saying that Crime Stoppers had proven itself to be a valuable weapon in the citizens' fight against crime and wouldn't it now be a shame if one court ruling totally destroyed the program. And Max Sklower took to the airwaves to say essentially the same thing.

Finally, three days before Christmas, Judge Fowlie made his ruling. We would not have to reveal the name of our Crime Stoppers tipster. What a Christmas present!

Ironically, four months later our Crime Stoppers tipster was arrested for possession of heroin. And he decided he wanted to cut a deal - he would testify against McGuinness if we reduced the drug charges from a felony to a misdemeanor. The deal was made and our Crime Stoppers tipster became our star witness - but not before four attempts were made on his life after his identity was revealed to the defense! We had to hide the tipster and his family out for more than a month before he testified.

After McGuinness was convicted of first degree murder, we moved the tipster and his family out of state at Crime Stoppers expense. We didn't want to have a dead tipster on our hands.

We learned a great deal from the McGuinness case. First of all, that was the last time I ever personally paid off one of our tipsters. Second, we started the procedure of telling our callers that if they truly wanted to remain anonymous - at least to us - then they couldn't tell us anything about themselves. Just the facts, ma'am.

Learning from our mistakes became a way of life for our Crime Stoppers program. We discovered that most corporations would not donate to an organization unless it had a 501 (c)(3) non-profit designation from the Internal Revenue Service. So we filled out the forms and got our designation.

We discovered that the public tuned in on Monday nights to see our reenactments on television. And so I began going down to the office every Monday night at 10:00 p.m. so that the news anchor could finish up the Crime Stoppers segment by saying, "And if you have

information about this crime, give Crime Stoppers a call right now. Detective MacAleese is standing by to take your call.” We solved dozens of cases before sunrise the next day.

In fact, our first full year of operation resulted in the solution of a lot of crime - 288 cases - and the recovery of more than \$306,600 worth of stolen property (we didn't take information on drug deals since our Narcotics Unit had its own “snitch” fund). But I was even more proud of our record in court, Out of the 35 people tried in court, all of them were convicted in our first year.

It might have been coincidence, and then again maybe it wasn't, that Albuquerque began a 36 consecutive month decline in crime the month after Crime Stoppers began. It was the first time we had achieved a reduction in crime since the mid-1960's!

The Growth of Crime Stoppers

We discovered that other communities were interested in starting up a Crime Stoppers program of their own. At first other cities were curious about what we were doing. The national media had heard about us and so NBC's “Today Show” did a three-minute segment about us in September, 1977. The New York Times printed an extensive front-page story about the program in January, 1978.

But perhaps the most impact came from two articles printed in 1977. The first was an article written by me for *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* on the “Law Enforcement Role in Crime Stoppers.” That article was widely read by law enforcement administrators. Many of them corresponded with me to get more information about Crime Stoppers or, in many cases, they sent someone from their department to Albuquerque to study the program.

The second article appeared in *Parade Magazine*, the weekend supplement to thousands of newspapers across the United States. I had been named the “National Police Officer of the Year” by the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The honor, and the subsequent magazine article, created tremendous credibility for Crime Stoppers.

Until the national media discovered the program, most police departments had heard about Crime Stoppers through word of mouth. Police chiefs or sheriffs would ask for information about the program and I would tell them that all I had were some newspaper and magazine articles, a copy of our by-laws and standing rules and a sample of our questionnaire. We didn't have an operational manual - we were rewriting the rules every day.

I particularly enjoyed when a department would send one of their officers to do an on-site inspection of the program because then I would stick the visitor on our Crime Stoppers telephone and make him answer some calls. It was a good break for me and there was no better way to learn about Crime Stoppers than to actually take some tips over the phone. In fact, every person who received this type of personalized training over the years has turned out to be an outstanding Crime Stoppers coordinator!

Crime Stoppers-USA

However, we knew that we had to create a more formalized process to help spread the work of Crime Stoppers around the country. That led Coleman Tily and me to create Crime Stoppers-USA in 1979.

The goal of Crime Stoppers-USA was to create as many new Crime Stoppers programs as possible across America and to make sure they operated under the same rules and regulations as our own program in Albuquerque. Coleman and I prepared the *Crime Stoppers-USA Operational Manual*, a 235-page loose-leaf book describing in great detail how a Crime Stoppers program should be run. Funded by the State of New Mexico, the Operational Manual was quickly sold out. Two years later a second, more comprehensive, *Crime Stoppers Operational Manual* was prepared. More than 2,500 copies were sold.

But we needed something more. And so in October, 1980, Crime Stoppers-USA held its first annual conference. We had 225 people in attendance at that first conference, an impressive number considering we had only 59 programs in operation in 1980 - half of them in New Mexico!

Since the creation of Crime Stoppers-USA, the program has undergone very few changes. True, we are much more sophisticated about how we process our tips, how we raise donations for our reward funds and the type of media coverage we create. And we now have an extensive file of Crime Stoppers case law.

Crime Stoppers International

However, one major change is that we no longer are Crime Stoppers-USA. We had to change the name in 1983 to reflect a major development in the organization --we became Crime Stoppers International when first Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and then Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, joined our ranks.

Now there are more than 950 Crime Stoppers programs in 18 countries and U.S. territories. Before the end of the 20th century, I fully anticipate having Crime Stoppers programs in more than 50 countries. You see, we are still growing and improving every day!

When I first started Crime Stoppers in 1978, I thought it might be, a program that would last six months to a year. Now, after solving more than 425,000 crimes in the past 17 years and recovering \$2.9 billion worth of stolen property and narcotics , I honestly believe Crime Stoppers will be solving major crimes well into the 21st century.

All we need is your help.