

Coventry students get a lesson

Head of state's crime lab visits high school, tells students it's not like TV

JESSICA BOISCLAIR
Jboisclair@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Students from Coventry High School gathered in the media center yesterday to learn about what it takes to work in a crime laboratory and the different ways evidence is collected at a crime scene.

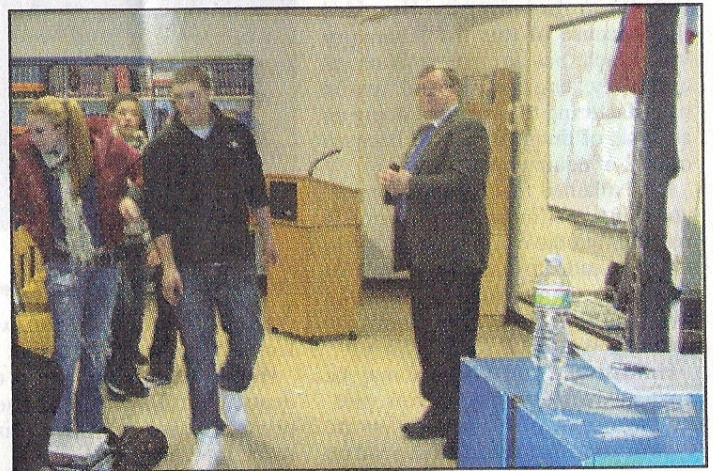
Director of the Rhode Island State Crime Laboratory at the University of Rhode Island, Dennis Hilliard gave a presentation to approximately 30 students about what he does while he's at work.

Hilliard explained to the students that he began his work at

the State Crime Laboratory in 1980. He also said that if anybody is interested in working in the laboratory field they would have to receive a bachelor's degree in science to get a foundational background to learn the material.

He let the students know right away that working in a crime laboratory is not like what they see on television shows like C.S.I. or NCIS. He explained that it takes time to analyze any evidence that may come into his laboratory.

He told the students that something that is often mistaken is that people who work in the labora-



Jessica Boisclair/Daily Times

Dennis Hilliard, Director of the state crime lab at the University of Rhode Island, adjourns his presentation at Coventry High School yesterday afternoon.

tory usually do not go out to the crime scenes themselves. He added that the Coventry Police Department has several trained police officers that work in crime

scene investigation that will go to the crime scenes and process the evidence.

Hilliard said that once the

See LESSON, Page A-2

Lesson in crime scene investigation at CHS

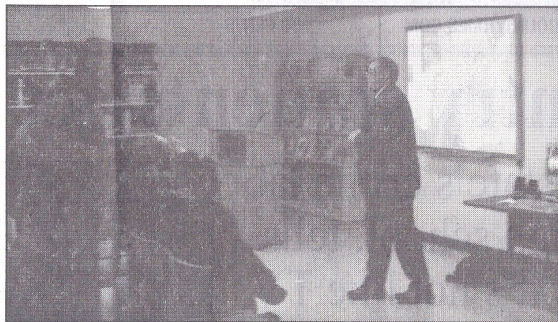
Continued from Page 1

investigators collect the evidence then it will make its way to the laboratory.

He explained to the high school students that the crime laboratory is the only one in the state that is fully associated with the university. He added that because of this the laboratory will reach out to majors such as chemistry, engineering and textile manufacturing to assist it in doing an analysis of things it cannot, because of lack of equipment.

He explained that the most important thing in criminal investigation is maintaining the chain of custody. He told the students that this means that you have documentation from the time you find the evidence until the time it gets to court.

Hilliard said that evidence may be contained in paper bags, boxes, plastic bags or cans. He added that the type of container used will depend on



Jessica Boisclair/Daily Times

Hilliard uses a SmartBoard at Coventry High School as a visual aid during his presentation.

the type of evidence that was collected from the scene.

He went on to explain to the students how fingerprints and palm prints are used as evidence in crime scene investigation.

"Now unlike C.S.I. you will not get a clean pristine print," he said while showing them a slide of a fingerprint found on a plastic bag at a crime scene.

He explained that one of the ways

they pull fingerprints from evidence is putting super glue on a hot plate and pulling the imprint off the item.

"One of the most common ways to identify somebody is by fingerprints or dental records," he told the students.

Hilliard got the students involved by showing them slides of a man who smashed the window of a car with a baseball bat. He asked the students what types of evidence would be found on the windshield and what they would do when they first get to the crime scene.

Many of the students yelled out that they would look at the windshield first for any evidence left behind such as metal, plastic or paint. They then told Hilliard they would search the area for any type of weapon.

He told the students that many different types of evidence are left behind. These types of evidence are trace evidence which includes: hairs,

fibers, glass, paint, soil, gunshot residue, plastics, fire debris and vegetation.

Hilliard then went on to explain the different types of crime scenes that occur and what they tend to find at scenes such as arson investigations, hit and runs and breaking and entering.

He added that two types of firearms usually pass through his laboratory. He said these are semi-automatics and revolvers. He explained to the students how each of the firearms worked and what they look for in the laboratory on the guns in order to extract evidence.

Hilliard ended his presentation by explaining to the students about a few different murder cases that have happened in Rhode Island over time.

He said that sometimes the biggest problem is that during these cases people become biased, but that as an investigator you have to "do your job and let the jury system do its job."