

Orlando police have no uncleared murders in 2010

Orlando's 100% clearance rate for murders comes just a few years after the city's murder rate hit an all-time high in 2006, when 49 were killed.



Orlando police Detective Joseph Gribble shows the Murder Board, which lists homicides for 2010. OPD has solved all 11 homicides so far in 2010, a feat for a department once swamped by a record number of killings. (RED HUBER/ORLANDO SENTINEL)

By Bianca Prieto, Orlando Sentinel

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Orlando police Detective Joseph Gribble's first case in the homicide unit seemed nearly impossible to solve.

Gribble investigated the death of Connie Walker, killed in a drive-by shooting Aug. 16 in west Orlando.

Few clues were left behind: no fingerprints, DNA or a murder weapon.

But within days of Walker's murder, an anonymous tipster led officers to two men now charged with committing the city's 11th homicide this year.

Those arrests cleared all of Orlando's murder cases in 2010 — a rare milestone in a city with about 235,000 people that only a few years ago experienced a record number of homicides.

"A 100 percent clearance rate is hard to achieve," said [University of Central Florida](#) sociology professor Jay Corzine, who studies national and local criminal-justice issues. "It definitely stands out."

Gribble and his partner, veteran Detective Chris Newton, arrested Demetrius Greene and Dematyjora Scott in connection to the gang-related shooting after getting a tip.

Both are charged with first-degree murder and are held without bond at the Orange County Jail.

Though homicide detectives are satisfied with their successes this year, they are cautiously optimistic about the future because murders — and the circumstances that lead up to them — are impossible to predict.

"Of course we are happy with the numbers currently, but we realize things could change," said homicide Sgt. Richard Lane, who was assigned to the unit in July. "There are still four months left in the year."

Meanwhile, detectives are looking into [cold](#) cases and having success solving some of them.

In 2006, the city had a record 49 homicides. From 2006 through 2009, detectives have investigated 158 homicides and solved 109, leaving 49 cases unsolved.

During that time, the clearance rate was about 69 percent. Nationally, the rate is about 63 percent, the [FBI](#) said.

In 2009, 28 people were killed. Detectives are at loss to explain this year's drop in homicides.

"We've pondered that question a million times," Lane said.

Lane said department initiatives to crack down on drug dealers and get illegal guns off the streets have played a big role in bringing down the city's violence. Because of those initiatives, drug- and gun-related homicides have dropped. Most of this year's slayings have been domestic-violence related.

"The big driver of homicides in urban areas is illegal activities," said Corzine, the UCF professor. "There does seem to be some significant progress in Orlando in terms of reducing the size of the illegal-drug and gun markets."

Many of this year's domestic-violence slayings have been murder-suicides, but in previous years, many of the homicides occurred between rival gangs or drug dealers, Lane said.

Those cases are typically harder to solve, because no one wants to get involved, he said.

But in Walker's murder, even though it was gang-related, someone stepped forward and called Crimeline and gave a key tip.

"The community is changing," Lane said. "People aren't putting up with it anymore."

Bianca Prieto can be reached at bprieto@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5620.