

## Internship with Escambia County Crime Lab

For the last semester I have had the opportunity to complete an internship with the Escambia County Sheriff's Office in Pensacola Florida. I was fortunate enough to have the chance to work side by side with the Crime Scene Unit of Escambia County. By learning how to perform the day to day activities of a crime scene technician, I have learned practical purposes of the educational information I have been taught. I thoroughly enjoyed performing the tasks of a crime scene technician and seeing how the Crime Scene Unit worked with other agencies such as the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Removal Service, and the Medical Examiner's Office.

During my time as an intern I was asked to execute various duties including as photographing crime scenes, filling out paperwork, drawing sketches, bagging evidence, writing narratives. Photography is one of the most important tasks carried out on a day to day basis; without photography it would be difficult to reconstruct the crime scene and remember where everything in the room was positioned. Like most jobs, there was an abundant amount of paperwork necessary to be filled out for each case. Of course there were numerous forms to fill out either by hand or on a computer, but I also used the Microsoft Visio program I learned how to use Visio to draw sketches for major cases. Both the paperwork and the Visio tasks were tedious, but seemed to intrigue me the most. After each case, there was evidence to be processed. I was taught a certain procedure that needed to be followed when bagging,

labeling, and turning in evidence. I also learned that there are many different ways to process evidence depending on the type of case that we were investigating. Finally, I was given a chance to write a few narratives from some of the simple cases that I handled.

When collecting evidence or even being on a crime scene, I learned that the most important thing was to always wear gloves. If gloves are not used to collect the evidence then fingerprints and trace evidence can be destroyed. Also, if the case is taken to trial and gloves were not worn while handling the evidence the evidence will then be inadmissible. There is a procedure that must be followed when processing each piece of evidence. The basic procedure is to make sure there is always a picture of the evidence. Next, the evidence is bagged and placed into an envelope. The envelope is labeled with the case number, case description, date, and the item number of the evidence in that case. At the bottom of the envelope is a description of what is in the envelope. Finally, the envelope is taped with evidence tape and signed with the crime scene technician's signature and number. The seal is to ensure that nobody has opened the evidence. An evidence form is filled out and the evidence is turned into the Evidence Locker. The evidence form is used to help maintain a chain of custody. A chain of custody is extremely important in any case and helps to track who has handled the evidence. Evidence technicians are important because they help keep track of all the evidence as well as the forms to track the chain of custody.

Throughout my internship there were many tasks that I was asked to fulfill before the end of the semester. Each of the tasks was interesting and had its own importance in the job. These tasks included doing the job of a crime scene technician. First, I performed the task of photographing crime scenes. These scenes included but were not limited to burglaries, sexual assaults, and child abuse cases. Although photographing a scene does not seem hard, there are guidelines that needed to be followed. In each case, pictures of the whole scene are first taken to get an idea of where everything is located. Next, pictures are taken at a mid-ranged view to get the evidence in a more centralized picture. Finally, a close-up shot is necessary to show exactly what the evidence is, and to document anything that is in the immediate vicinity of the evidence. Once these photos are taken, pictures with an L-shaped scale are taken to measure the size of the evidence or the wound.

My next task included processing the scene of a crime. While on scene, I usually helped in the processing of fingerprints and in the collection of other evidence. Unlike the television shows, good fingerprints are difficult to find. I learned how to dust for fingerprints and how to collect the prints, while helping on my first burglary. Once the fingerprints were lifted and collected they were turned into our Latent Print Examiners who use the AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) system to help catch the suspect. The AFIS system helps narrow the field down to 25-30 possibilities then it is up the Latent Examiners to look through all of the possibilities and compare them to the latent print collected to see if any are a match. Talking with the Latent Print Examiners and watching

them work I have concluded that they have a difficult job and are an extreme help to the Sheriff's Office. There are many other ways besides dusting to process the evidence for fingerprints. Lab techniques such as using ninhydrin and superglue to bring out the fingerprints were taught to me by the lab technicians.

Being what other people call a small county, I learned that the Escambia County Sheriff's Office works with many agencies to perform their daily tasks. The Sheriff's Office has many units and facilities; but there are other agencies that they depend on such as the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Florida Removal Service, and the Medical Examiner. The FDLE is one of the only organizations that process deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and Gun Shot Residue (GSR) kits. I have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to take DNA swabs and GSR kits from suspects as evidence in cases. These kits and swabs are packaged and taken to the evidence department, who will in turn send them to the FDLE if necessary. When the FDLE finds a positive result then they will send them back to the Sheriff's Office and the deputies can put a warrant out for the suspect. The Florida Removal Service is extremely important because they work on call when we need them to transport a deceased person to the morgue. Without these people we would find it difficult to transport the bodies to the morgue. At the morgue the medical examiner and her team of investigators can be found. An autopsy is extremely important to determine the cause of death and to retrieve any evidence. An autopsy is an extremely interesting experience that I was privileged enough to be allowed to attend. I learned a lot about what they look for in the autopsy and how autopsies are

performed. Also I learned what is expected from the crime scene technical while attending an autopsy. In the long run, an autopsy is just like a crime scene. Digital photos are taken of the body both before the medical examiner begins cutting and after; and the clothes are taken as well as any evidence found in or on the body.

The education I am currently receiving has helped me throughout this experience. Being involved in an Evidence class and Forensic Science class has helped me understand why the Sheriff's Office works the way they do. I can understand why we cannot search a car or a person's home for evidence if a search warrant has not been obtained. Then, once the warrant is obtained, the reason for why we collect, bag, and tag the evidence in a certain manner. For example, there have been times where I have gone back to the very basics which include taking notes when first arriving on scenes. The information I have taken has come back to help the investigators answer questions. Also, this process of being an intern has helped me see a practical side of my education. Being able to see real world applications of what I am currently studying has been the greatest benefit to being an intern. I have also been able to understand more about what I am learning by actually performing the duties of a crime scene technician.

My advice to future interns is to always perform the duties you are asked to do to the best of your ability. I have found that philosophy to be extremely helpful to my internship. Also, always remembered that you are there to learn and help assist whomever you are working with. Further, not only is it important

to make a good impression on the agency you are working for because they could be your future employer and you want them to remember the good work you do for them, but you could be processing scenes and actually help in solving crimes. This is one of the most invigorating experiences I have been involved with since I have been in school. To anyone else who gets this experience: do not get overwhelmed because there is a lot of information to take in; but you will be able to go over the information again on other cases. Finally, do not forget to ask questions and learn from anyone who is willing to teach you about what they do.

In conclusion, I am extremely fortunate for the opportunity to be involved in an internship with the Escambia County Sheriff's Office. I have learned about what it means to be a crime scene technician and the duties that are required of these technicians. The glamour of the crime scene technician's duties described in the television shows is not exactly portrayed in the real life job. I learned that there was an excessive amount of paperwork necessary for each case to help verify that all the proper procedures were followed in the processing of the crime scene. There are many jobs performed at the Sheriff's Office and I believe that crime scene is one of the most interesting, important jobs.