

Convict charged in 1986 slaying

New tests solved Fitchburg woman's killing, officials say

By **Martine Powers** and **John R. Ellement** Globe Staff, January 11, 2012, 12:00 a.m.

 Christopher Fletcher is serving a life term in the 1995 killing of Elizabeth Salsbury. Christopher Fletcher is serving a life term in the 1995 killing of Elizabeth Salsbury. 1995 FILE PHOTO

WORCESTER - Twenty-five years after a Fitchburg woman was left for dead on the side of a Lancaster road, police say they have caught her killer, a convicted murderer serving a life sentence, a case bolstered by advances in forensic science.

Christopher Fletcher, 50, pleaded not guilty yesterday to charges of murder, aggravated rape, kidnapping, and assault and battery with a dangerous weapon in the slaying of Peggy Sue Calvillo, a 24-year-old mother of two whose battered body was found Dec. 6, 1986.

Fletcher, once of Leominster, is serving life without parole for the rape and murder of Elizabeth Salsbury of Lunenburg, a beauty salon owner who was attacked and killed inside her shop in 1995.

“This is a story about how dogged police work, ever-improving technology, and science helped lead to the indictment of a convicted murderer for a horrible crime committed more than 25 years ago,” Worcester District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr. said at a press conference.

Fletcher will next appear in court on Feb. 9.

Fletcher had been on the radar of police agencies for the Calvillo killing since 1995, when he said he had killed 12 people, including Calvillo. At the time, Fletcher gave police

details about Calvillo's death "that only the person who could have committed the murder would have known," Early said.

But evidence in the case was tested in 1995 and no DNA match to Fletcher was found, so he was not charged, Early said.

Advances in forensic technology, along with a federal grant to help cover the cost of cold-case investigations, allowed authorities to send evidence from the crime scene to a private lab for new tests two years ago. Specifically, retesting of the sexual assault evidence collection kit yielded pivotal clues, Early said.

"Literally, this technology changes almost monthly," Early said. "The stuff we have now is light years ahead."

Results came back in December, and Early said there was a DNA match to Fletcher.

"With regards to unsolved cases, time can be an enemy right around the time of the murder," the top prosecutor said. "But as time passes, time can be a friend," he said, referring to improvements in forensics that make new arrests possible.

On the night of her death, Calvillo left her job in Sterling shortly after midnight and waited at the side of Route 12 for a friend to pick her up, Early said. When the friend did not show up, she began to walk home.

Prosecutors allege that Fletcher struck Calvillo with his car, causing severe injuries. Fletcher dragged the woman into the car, Early said. As Fletcher drove her to a remote location in Lancaster, she begged to be taken to a hospital, Early said. Instead, Calvillo allegedly raped her and left her to die in a secluded area off Old Turnpike Road.

Her body was found later that day, underneath power lines.

Calvillo's two children were both under 2 years old when she was killed. Yesterday, they sat stone-faced at the back of the courtroom, along with Calvillo's parents and husband,

during the press conference. They declined to speak with reporters.

Early said he does not know if Fletcher may be responsible for other killings.

But he said he believes this case will provide hope for families waiting for justice in other unsolved killings.

“We’re never going to give up hope; we’re never going to stop,” Early said. “We know how the victims feel. We see their pain. The pain is there like the crime had occurred yesterday.”

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