



How to be cool without leather pants or a Hummer

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A real live CSI guy came home this week to help give out some awards to local police officers.

Greg LaBerge is a transplanted Saultbie and has been the director of the Denver Police Department's crime laboratory for about a year now.

He was the keynote speaker at Tuesday's Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce Police Services Awards luncheon at the Best Western Inn on Great Northern Road.

LaBerge said that the show *CSI* is both a blessing and a curse to real-life crime scene investigators.

The show heightens awareness and public sensitivity to the science of crime scene investigation, but it also raises expectations of performance, he said.

"To a great extent, I probably wouldn't be standing here talking to you today if it wasn't for *CSI*," said LaBerge. "For the first time in my career, my job is cool although I don't wear leather pants to work or drive a Hummer."

"But they don't actually present accurately the amount of time it takes us to do it," he said. "There's no way anyone can get any results in an hour."

LaBerge told guests at the luncheon how the real-life methods of crime scene investigation have changed over the years.

At one time, the crime lab in Denver consisted of a single microscope.

LaBerge told a story about convincing his Chief of Police to buy one less assault rifle for the SWAT team and a computer for him instead.



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"I went to the chief and told him I needed a new computer for the DNA system," said LaBerge. "Although it doesn't sound as cool as a sniper rifle, when I turn it on I'm going to get about 30 to 40 percent matches out of this data."

LaBerge was very pleased that his chief sided with him and that he's gotten so much support from Denver Police Services because it's helped to make the Denver crime lab a leader in advancing in CSI techniques. The Denver lab is helping expand the American DNA data base very quickly and has easy access to Canada's national DNA bank as well, providing better odds of matching a sample to a suspect.

"Not only does it help us catch criminals," LaBerge said. "It helps us eliminate suspects before we spend very much of our resources on the investigation."

LaBerge said that crime scene investigation techniques have changed the way crime scenes are approached and have eliminated suspects who may have been wrongly implicated in violent crimes before such investigative techniques existed.

In the future, he hopes that the DNA data base can be expanded to include access to direct family relatives of people on file as well.

LaBerge used a current case being handled by his lab as an example.

He said that DNA collected from three victims of violent rapes was matched closely enough to a sample in the data base in Oregon to indicate that the man from whom the sample was taken is not a suspect in the crime, but is nonetheless closely related to that man and could lead investigators to the perpetrator.

"The FBI won't allow us to get the guy's name in Oregon because he isn't an exact match," said LaBerge. "So we're putting some pressure on the federal government to try to get us access to that guy."

LaBerge left the Sault in the late 1980s to study molecular biology and genetics at the University of Guelph.

In 2000 he received his Master's of Science in Biostatistics degree from the University of Colorado and now is working on his Ph.D in biochemistry and biophysics – human medical genetics.