

# CSI for the foot guy

Forensic podiatrist views crime scenes from a unique perspective

BY ROB EARNSHAW  
Times Correspondent

**M**aybe they can base a recurring character on Dr. Michael Nirenberg for one of those "CSI" television shows.

After all, when a crime scene involves a severed foot, bloody shoe or strange footprint, who else better to seek consulting from than a forensic podiatrist?

"A footprint tells you more than a fingerprint," said Nirenberg, podiatrist with Friendly Foot Care in Crown Point. "A criminal can wear gloves and hide his fingerprints, but it is rare that they can enter and leave a crime scene without using their feet."

Nirenberg is one of few forensic podiatrists in the country. When he was studying to become a podiatrist, Nirenberg became interested in every which way of looking at feet, particularly regarding forensics and the role feet play in a crime scene.

While in college, Nirenberg wrote an award-winning paper on forensic podiatry and how this new specialty needed an organization. A few years after his paper was published, the American Society of Forensic Podiatry was formed, of which Nirenberg is among the board of directors.

In addition to taking several courses in forensics medicine, Nirenberg has studied forensic analysis of footwear with Bill Bodziak - one of the FBI's top footwear examiners.

Forensic podiatrists like Nirenberg are able to look at the foot, footwear or footprints and be able to link a suspect to a crime scene. With the help of X-ray records, they've also helped identify

remains of deceased by their feet, particularly victims of airplane crashes, especially involving military personnel.

"Their feet survive because they are in boots - and nothing else survives," Nirenberg said. "A person can be identified just by the foot in the boot."

Footprints also can be looked at to gain an approximation of someone's height and how that person walks. Forensic podiatrists also can determine a person's footwear if he or she has any foot deformities.

Nirenberg volunteers his services to law enforcement agencies and so far has been involved with one homicide and consulted on two others.

In one case, two people were murdered in Napa, Idaho. A suspect was arrested a short distance from the crime scene and wasn't wearing shoes. A pair of bloody boots was discovered at the crime scene and Nirenberg was asked by officials to determine if the boots belonged to the suspect. Ultimately, the suspect pleaded guilty.

"But that's the kind of determining a forensic podiatrist can make," Nirenberg said.

Shoes are often left at a violent crime scene and a forensic podiatrist can look at certain impressions a foot has made inside a shoe.

Forensic podiatry can either link the shoe to the suspect or prove it doesn't belong to the person in question.

Nirenberg recalled one case where a forensic podiatrist was called in to consult on the death of a young child whose liver was injured due to a contusion on the child's back.



Dr. Michael Nirenberg photographs a footprint during training as a forensic podiatrist. PHOTO PROVIDED

The boyfriend of the victim's mother originally was charged because he was baby-sitting the child when the injury occurred. The podiatrist studied the bruise left on the victim's back and found that the footprint could only have come from a child. Eventually the victim's sibling confessed that he jumped off a sofa onto the child's back "as a joke."

"It's just as important to be able to disprove that the shoes or footprints do not belong to a suspect," Nirenberg said.

By allowing himself to learn about the impressions that a foot will leave in a shoe or on the ground, Nirenberg has become a better podiatrist.

"It forces me to look at the foot from a perspective that very few people in the world look at a foot from," he said.

"It helps me become a better problem solver."