

NEIGHBORS

CROWN POINT/LOWELL

If the shoe fits ...

Crown Point podiatrist fighting crime



PHOTO PROVIDED

Podiatrist Michael Nirenberg examines the insides of shoes with a high-resolution fiber-optic camera to find clues in crime fighting. He says forensic podiatry also has made him a better doctor.

"It's really exciting to prove if someone is innocent or guilty. To put someone away or let them go free is a great feeling."

Michael Nirenberg, expert in forensic podiatry

By KATIE RAMSEY

Post-Tribune correspondent

CROWN POINT — Podiatrist Michael Nirenberg is putting his foot down when it comes to crime.

He has embarked on a journey to help law enforcement narrow down suspects in crimes and does it by looking at shoes.

It all started in 1989 when Nirenberg published a paper on forensic podiatry and won the Distinguished Podiatric Medical Writing Award.

In 2003, the American Society of Forensic Podiatrists was started, and Nirenberg was put on the ASFP Board of Directors. He is also on the subcommittee of the International Association for Identification.

What he does is study the wear patterns in a shoe or shoes left at a crime scene. Everyone has something unique in the way he or she walks. The imprints left in shoes tell a lot about the person who was wearing them.

Nirenberg compares the shoe to the suspect and infers characteristics about him or her.

"It's really exciting to prove if someone is innocent or guilty," he said. "To put someone away or let them go free is a great feeling."

Nirenberg started examining shoes with a dental mirror. While using a high-resolution fiber-optic camera for treating arthritis in ankles, he had an epiphany. The small, durable camera would be ideal for scoping out the inside of a shoe.

Nirenberg's idea has really paid off. The camera helps him look at the whole shoe more thoroughly than a mirror and allows him to videotape the session or take pictures for a jury to view later.

"Studying forensic podiatry allows me to look at feet, footprints and shoes differently than most podiatrists," Nirenberg said. "I am a better problem-solver (for patients) because of it."

Nirenberg said he is one of about 10 forensic podiatrists in the world. He has helped on a murder case in Kentucky and is working on one in Indiana.

Nirenberg has lectured to local and state law enforcement officials, Homeland Security and other podiatrists in Indiana. He will lecture locally in August.

Nirenberg also used his forensic podiatry skills to help save a man's life by discovering that his foot pain was due to a tumor in his neck.

"I wouldn't have been able to discover the real problem if it hadn't been for forensic podiatry," he said. "It has made me a better doctor."