

# Groups want criminal checks on repairmen

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By: Andrew Lyons

Sue Weaver didn't expect a twice-convicted sex offender to walk through her front door after calling for an air conditioning repairman from a well-known company. The repairman cleaned Weaver's air ducts in February 2001, then returned six months later to rape and kill the Orange County woman.

The story line is eerily similar to the case of Joshua Bryant and Lillian Martin unfolding in West Volusia County. Investigators believe the 10-year-old boy and his 77-year-old grandmother were abducted and killed by an electrician who had performed work earlier in their home.

A criminal background check on both killers would have revealed a past riddled with felony convictions. However, those checks were never done, nor does Florida law require it.

Police reports and interviews indicate Douglas McClymont, believed to have killed three other people in a day-long crime spree in May before killing himself, was familiar with the family before returning one Saturday morning to steal money for crack cocaine. Sheriff's deputies questioned McClymont following the disappearance but cleared him after hearing his alibi - smoking crack with friends, who have since recanted their story.

A senior case worker for the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children said he does not see a trend in home invasions committed by felons who have had access to a home.

But ever since the death of Weaver, 52, her sister has kept track of cases involving consumers who have been assaulted by people sent into their homes with criminal records for violent crimes. Her lobbying group, the Sue Weaver CAUSE - Consumer Awareness of Unsafe Service Employment - raises awareness that not all contractors can be trusted and presses for state and federal legislation requiring background checks. Also, a congressman from New Jersey is currently sponsoring a bill that directs the Federal Trade Commission to require businesses that send employees into homes to perform background checks. "Background checks", said Weaver's sister, Lucia Bone of Dallas, "make good business sense.

Contractors do not commonly conduct such checks, say business owners and trade industry executives. When asked if a background check was conducted on McClymont, his former employer, Lake Helen electrician Ted Roberts, told a News-Journal reporter: "No, and no other companies do either".

But that shouldn't be the case given the information is easily obtainable on the Internet, said John Overchuck, an Orlando attorney who represented the Weaver family in a civil suit following her death. Employers, in the past, have claimed ignorance when it comes to their workers committing criminal acts, Overchuck said. "It seems the defense of choice was 'ignorance is bliss,' and juries aren't buying into that anymore", he said. Rather than face a jury, the Burdines department store chain and a subcontractor settled a civil lawsuit in March by the Weaver family.

"My goal is for there to be a national background check for anyone who comes into a residence", said Bone, Weaver's sister. "It's not about liability. It's about a moral and legal obligation those employees have to us as consumers".

Not all businesses ignore the benefits of background checks, and some conduct drug tests. Bud Brewer with Massey Services said the termite and pest prevention company goes above

and beyond in screening prospective employees. Massey conducts drug tests, credit checks and criminal background checks in every state the applicant lived as an adult. "We try to weed out as many potential bad fits as possible", said Brewer, a company spokesman in Orlando.

And when it comes to allowing a repairman into your home, one sheriff's sergeant suggests people think with their heads, rather than their wallets. "The cheapest price that you get is not always the best price", said Jeffrey McDonnell, a crime prevention sergeant with the Volusia County Sheriff's District 2 office. "Sometimes you have to pay a little bit more for quality with a reputable company". As a personal rule, McDonnell never allows a stranger into his home unless he is present. He knows the lives of his wife and children could be at stake.

- Staff Writer Melissa Griggs contributed to this report.

#### Home Security

Sgt. Jeffrey McDonnell of the Volusia County Sheriff's Office offers the following tips for deciding who can conduct repairs, cleaning or other chores in your home.

- \* Hire a reputable company that is established in the area.
- \* Ask for a written estimate.
- \* Once they arrive, ask to see identification.
- \* Only allow them inside if you feel comfortable.
- \* Avoid hiring unsolicited help.

#### Talk About It

What steps do you take to ensure your safety when workers come to your home?

Share your thoughts: [www.news-journalonline.com](http://www.news-journalonline.com)

Since the death of her sister, Sue Weaver, Lucia Bone advises people that not all contractors can be trusted.

To contact Bone call 214-450-5812 or e-mail [lucia@SueWeaverCause.org](mailto:lucia@SueWeaverCause.org).

Contact staff writer Andrew Lyons at 386-252-1511 or [andy.lyons@news-jrnl.com](mailto:andy.lyons@news-jrnl.com).