

Former FBI profiler joins SCSU faculty

Expert on violence worries TV shows will spawn copycats

By John Hoogesteger

TIMES STAFF WRITER

John Campbell understands why movies like "Silence of the Lambs" and TV shows like "Millennium" and "Profiler" that feature serial killers are popular.

But the former member of the FBI's prestigious profiling unit has serious concerns about the effect the shows can have on some people.

"I have some concerns that this proliferation of serial killer stories will spawn copycats," Campbell said. "Someone may watch a show and have it trigger their fantasy.

"When we interviewed people like Ted Bundy and asked them how they got started doing this, they said that their fantasies were triggered by outside stimuli. So much of being a serial killer involves the individual's fantasies."

Campbell recently retired from a 25-year career with the FBI and this fall will join the faculty of St. Cloud State University as a distinguished professor. He spoke to the Times on Thursday from Rochester and was to be in St. Cloud today.

He joined the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit for four years in the early 1980s, when the unit was still in its infancy. He returned to head the unit from April 1989 to July 1992.

Campbell, who was working on his doctorate at Michigan State University when he was called back to active duty in the unit, actually was an expert on deadly force, not a behavioral specialist.

"They wanted to add some academic credibility to the behavioral science unit," Campbell explained.

At the time, the unit was much more modest than it is today.

"I don't think anyone imagined the demand for service would be so great," he said. "By the mid-80s, demand for services was beyond our resources."

Campbell said he understands

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John Campbell

WORKED TO SOLVE SERIAL KILLINGS

that interest in the Behavioral Science Unit has its roots in people's interest in serial killers.

"The public is mesmerized by serial killers," he said. "They have become a media event."

But the fiction of shows such as "The X-Files" is too far from the truth for Campbell.

"They take a little bit of reality and blend in the bizarre and the extreme," he said.

Some of his friends from the Behavioral Science Unit are consultants on shows such as "Millennium," and he has told them the shows need to come back to reality a bit.

"It isn't as easy as they make it look. When you profile a crime scene you see behavioral patterns, you don't get a flashback and see an image. It's very tedious and sometimes unsettling work to be analyzing things from some bizarre crime."

In addition to his expertise in behavioral science, Campbell also has an extensive background as an investigator, researcher, teacher and administrator.

His diverse criminal justice background has led to his being considered an expert on violence in America, which will be one of the topics for his lectures at St. Cloud State.

But being an expert doesn't mean he thinks he has all the answers, or even more answers than anyone else.

"Our violence problem is tied to our youth, but I don't have any quick answers to our youth violence problem," he said. "We're looking at something that involves a whole series of societal issues."

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Profiler

Campbell's focus on studying violence is to try to find ways to help the law enforcement community cope.

"We have thrust law enforcement into the forefront of dealing with many of these societal issues, many of which in the past were dealt with by families or communities," he said. "Part of the focus of my research has been to look at violence and try to provide law enforcement with the tools to combat it."

Campbell chose St. Cloud State to continue his work for several reasons.

He has roots in Minnesota and several family members living in the state. He was looking for a university in the Midwest and a friend, former FBI deputy director John Otto, a St. Cloud State graduate, encouraged Campbell to pursue a job there.

"The university has a fine criminal justice program. In my estimation, the strongest in the state," Campbell said.

He liked the fact that the school has both an undergraduate and a master's program, so that he could work with students at both levels.

"They have a lot of very progressive programs," he said.

Campbell also likes the fact that he will be working in a state recognized as a leader in law enforcement training. Minnesota has been at the forefront in setting standards for law enforcement officers.

"There are several initiatives I'm hoping to work on with law enforcement,"

he said. "There is a next plateau to reach in law enforcement training and I hope to be a part of that."

As an FBI agent, Campbell was involved in 40 or 50 high-profile cases, including the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa and the abduction of Jacob Wetterling, both of which remain unsolved.

People in the United States often don't realize that one of the prices of freedom is that it makes it easier for people to disappear, Campbell said.

"When I have given seminars in Europe, they simply cannot fathom being able to drive across the continent without having to have a passport or any other restrictions," he said. "The mobility in this country really is a factor."

He said the solution for law enforcement is good inter-agency cooperation, something that has been hampered in the past by territorial attitudes and turf wars.

"There is still some of that, but most agencies today recognize that so many crimes are interstate or even international," he said.

Campbell sees the need for inter-agency cooperation becoming even more crucial to law enforcement in the future.

He cited a recent case in which a suspect in St. Petersburg, Russia, used his computer to transfer funds from a Florida account into a Swiss bank.

"We needed a lot of cooperation on that case," he said. "And I think that's just the tip of the iceberg. As we become a global community, we also create a global crime community."