

Sarah R. Baumgartner

Professor Bellman

JRN 201

24 April 2018

Final Story

In the basement of the Oxford Police Department is an old jail cell. A single, metal barred door opens to grey concrete walls. In it, a buzzing light hangs overhead. This cell, however, is not used as a drunk tank for intoxicated residents or a safe place to keep dangerous suspects anymore.

Where there was once a single bench in the cell is now a desk, piled high with paperwork and fake IDs. Wooden shelves line every wall from floor to ceiling, bags and plastic containers filled with various alcohols, weapons and crime-scene-evidence are organized in a seemingly chaotic way. In the corner is a locked metal container. The strong, distinct aroma of marijuana lingers from it. This is not a jail cell. This is Perry Gordon's office and the only room in the department that houses evidence.

Gordon, an unassuming, middle aged man, worked as a police officer for both Miami University and Oxford police as well as the director of parking and transportation services at the university. Two years ago, he became the property room custodian for the Oxford Police Department. Here, he operates the evidence collection procedures for the department. Since December 2016, Gordon handled more than 1,500 pieces of evidence and property.

“All evidence is property, not all property is evidence.” Gordon said. Evidence is classified as an object related to or found at a crime scene. Property, however, is any object that

comes through the office. This can range from recovered stolen property to lost items that are turned into the department. Property is less common than evidence.

When a court case closes and evidence is no longer needed, that evidence is destroyed. Most of this is outsourced, with some exceptions. Smaller drug paraphernalia is destroyed in house. "This is my official disposal kit," Gordon said, while pulling out a hammer from his drawer. Of the last 1,500 items Gordon processed in a year and a half, about 1,000 of those were destroyed.

Much of the evidence sitting in Gordon's office are various alcoholic drinks. He estimates his shelves hold about 45 bottles of liquor and about 400 cans of beer. Because these bottles and cans are crime related, they must be destroyed. Rather than throw away everything, Gordon thought of a recycling program to begin this year. "I'm trying to get one or two students to help me empty the alcohol containers," Gordon said. "This could serve as their sanction if they have an alcohol violation."

A broken broom stick classified as a murder weapon is a more serious piece of evidence Gordon dealt with.

Some of the property in Gordon's office is more unique than others. Hanging on a top shelf is a cow costume sized for a full-grown man. In October of 2016, an officer received a call about an intoxicated man near the Shell gas station on the corner of College and High street. When the officer arrived, the man fled the scene and was pursued by the officer. He called dispatch about his pursuit and when asked for a description, he informed them the suspect was in a cow costume. "The costume wasn't turned in as evidence, actually," Gordon said. "It's here for safe keeping. I sent the guy a property release notification, but he never collected it."

Other odd objects include a bowling ball that a suspect threw at a police car and a mini-cannon a man shot off in his residence to announce to his neighbors when he had sex with his girlfriend.

“Everything must be logged specifically,” Lieutenant Lara Fening said. “We have to think way ahead to avoid future questions or discrepancy. It’s important to have the purest evidence and avoid liability.”

“Every report we take ends up coming through me,” Investigative Sergeant Dave King said. “I have to figure out if there needs to be follow up or if it needs kicked back to the court.”

Gordon sat back in his chair and looked around his evidence room with a small smile, “There’s a place for everything and everything is in its place.”

Evidence Collection Process

This illustrates the processing of evidence from beginning to end at the Oxford Police Department

Dropoff

Any evidence from a case is dropped off in a locker outside Gordon's office

STEP
01



STEP
02

Collection

Gordon checks the locker for any evidence and brings it into his office/storage room

Registration

The evidence is entered into a database and given a barcode. It is then placed on its proper shelf

STEP
03



STEP
04

Location

If the evidence is brought up in a court case, Gordon locates it and allocates it to the proper case

Destruction

If that court case closes, a court order will be given to destroy the evidence

STEP
05

