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'CSI: Crime Scene Insects' to tour

■ The science exhibit, which features some of the forensic entomology used on the popular television show, CSI, opens this week in Minnesota.

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The bugs don't lie.

Maggots and other insects found at a crime scene can provide investigators with important clues, according to a new exhibit making its world premiere at the Science Museum of Minnesota on Saturday, the first stop on a tour booked through 2007.

"CSI: Crime Scene Insects," explores the rapidly growing field of forensic entomology, and how insects can crack cases and bring killers to justice.

Not only was the exhibit inspired by the hit "CSI" TV shows, its curator is a consultant for both of them. He also does work for the FBI and law enforcement agencies around the world.

"It's really kind of exciting," said the curator Lee Goff, chairman of the forensic sciences program at Chaminade University of Honolulu. "It's a chance to bring something to people that 20 years ago I don't think anyone would have been interested in."

Goff's business card reads: "Know maggots, will travel." It depicts a little worm staring through a detective's magnifying glass.

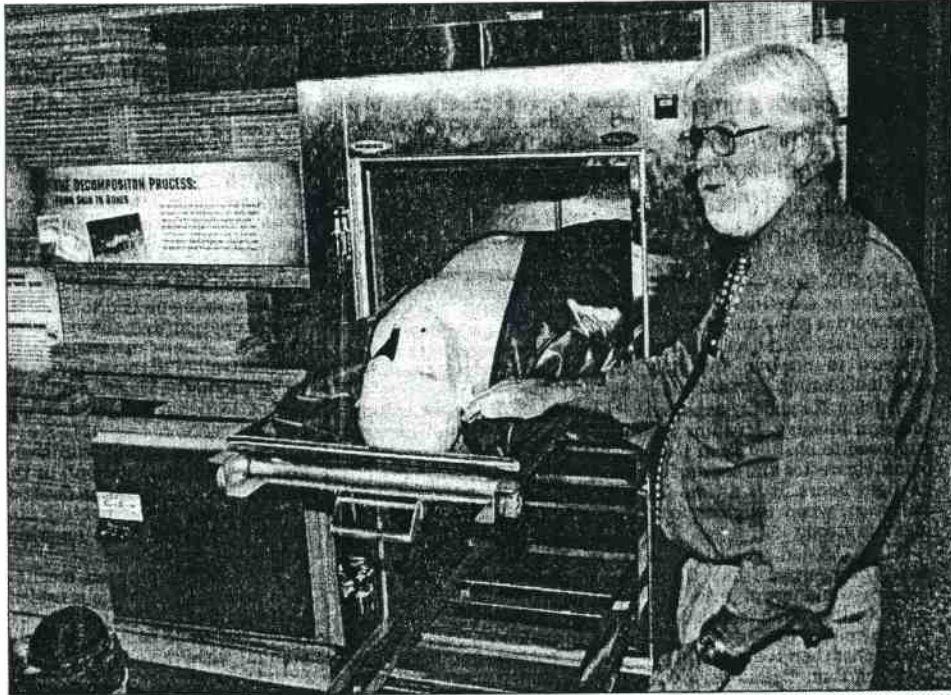
The types of insects on a body and their stages of development can help determine the time since death. They can also provide clues to the cause of death, where the victim was killed and whether drugs or other toxins might have been involved.

Courts allow the evidence because bugs make good witnesses, Goff said.

"They're predictable and they really don't care," Goff said. "And as long as you do a nice objective analysis of what's going on, you kind of follow that trail of evidence, they're going to bring you to the truth of what happened."

In Hawaii, Goff said, blow flies will start laying eggs on a corpse within 10 minutes of death. Wherever it happens, fly eggs hatch into maggots, which metamorphose into pupae, which emerge from their shells as adult flies. Other insects show up later, some to nibble on the corpse, some to prey on the other bugs, some to do both.

The interactive exhibit gives visitors the chance to sort through



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LEE GOFF, chairman of the forensic sciences program at Chaminade University in Honolulu, stands by a true-to-life dummy in a morgue crypt exhibit display in St. Paul, Minn., where the Science Museum of Minnesota will open the exhibit: CSI: Crime Scene Insects on Saturday.

the insect evidence at simulated crime scenes and try to solve them. One is based on a real case in Hawaii, where a body was dumped in a sugar cane field.

The exhibit is designed to offer something for all ages and interest levels. Younger visitors can learn about the basics of insect anatomy, then build a bug of their own from a collection of insect body parts. Preserved and living maggots, beetles, flies and other bugs are on display.

But because some parts might be too gruesome for younger or squeamish visitors, a curtain fences off the crime scenes, as well as an exploration of the five stages of decomposition and a pair of open morgue drawers. In them are two

model cadavers, one showing how the first insects take up residence in a body shortly after death via the nose and other openings, and one depicting advanced decomposition with a video screen on its chest showing how maggots have invaded.

It's "a little graphic, but they see worse stuff on prime time TV," Goff said.

"CSI: Crime Scene Insects" ends its run at the Science Museum of Minnesota Jan. 19. It next goes to the Science Museum of Western Virginia in Roanoke, Va. The Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History will host the exhibit in Spring 2005.

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