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## Redlands DNA lab aims for top accreditation

Stacia Glenn, Staff Writer

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REDLANDS - There's no assembly line at this DNA lab.

At Human Identification Technologies Inc., each case warrants one forensic scientist to spend at least 54 hours analyzing evidence that is often smaller than a pinhole.

There is a shift among private labs toward forensic assembly lines - one scientist prepares testing chemicals, another determines what type of DNA it is, and yet another interprets the data.

"We don't subscribe to that," said company President Blaine Kern. "We're what you'd call old school."

It's that attitude that will likely make HIT the first lab - public or private - in the state to earn international accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors' board.

Fewer than 50 labs worldwide have been awarded this level of recognition.

This has been the goal since the 7,000-square-foot lab opened in 2005, said Marketing Director Rod Landon, and the last 18 months have been intense preparation for the accreditation inspection last month.

The board has to make a determination within 180 days.

There are two separate labs in the building at 440 Business Center Court: the mitochondrial lab, which can only determine a suspect's

bloodline, and the nuclear testing lab, which extracts DNA from blood, semen and saliva.

The company works with 250 DNA samples a month, though it's looking to open a second facility that would enable it to almost triple business.

Police and sheriff's departments send evidence from as far away as Mexico, Alaska and Washington, D.C.

When evidence is handed over to the company, it is kept in a vault behind a blast-proof door with framing filled with concrete.

There are nine forensic scientists, but only one is chosen for each case to eliminate any confusion by sharing work.

Digital photographs and measurements are taken, sketches are made and evidence is placed under a high-powered microscope. Any possible evidence is circled with a magic marker for closer inspection.

It is then placed in a 1.5 milliliter tube. (A can of soda is 455 milliliters.) The tube is put in a heat block to purify it and determine whether there is enough DNA.

To withstand testing, DNA must be 1 billionth of a gram. A packet of sugar is a gram. Years ago, a bloodstain had to be the size of a dime to be properly analyzed.

"One of the exciting things about DNA is it's only about 20 years old and there's constant advancement," said Lab Director Mehul Anjaria. "Not only are we able to look at more samples but we can work samples quicker."

Most labs are so backlogged it takes six months to get results. HIT averages 20 days - three days if it's a rush request.

The last step is putting the evidence through polymerase chain reaction testing, which makes copies of cell information and places a chemical tag on them.

There are 3 billion formations in a single DNA cell.

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The company deals only with criminal cases. Anjaria testified about DNA evidence in the case of convicted serial killer Wayne Adam Ford, who was recently sentenced to death for the murders of four women around the state.

Gaining international accreditation dominates much of Anjaria's thoughts.

"It would be a significant accomplishment," said Ralph Keaton, executive director of the accreditation board.

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