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DNA equipment donation boosts fight against crime

BLISS BARBER

A RECENT donation of DNA profiling equipment valued at R232 000 will see criminal investigators in Cape Town moving forward in forensic analysis and the fight against crime, officials said.

Yesterday afternoon project leader and founder of the DNA Project, Vanessa Lynch, joined senior superintendent of the Western Cape Forensic Science Lab, Mafiki Maluleke, in a ceremonial handing over of forensic equipment to the laboratory in Bellville.

The lab was the second to receive a donation from the organisation, which was formed by Lynch after evidence in her father's murder investigation three and a half years ago was mishandled by police.

"I recognised that there were shortfalls, and I wanted to address these shortfalls with a constructive approach," said Lynch. She said it was important to make "tangible" progress at the "operational level," beginning with the lab workers forced to do "the best they can with the little they have".

The contribution included a GeneAmp designed for DNA replication, blood spatter analysis software, an autoclave used for sterilisation, auto-con-

trolled measurement pipettes, a digital camera and data verification kit for cataloguing pictures of legally recognisable evidence, and a microcentrifuge for substance separation.

According to Maluleke, the current backlog of cases that require forensic analysis before appearing in court is about 600. "This donation will help us put in more cases than we would have been able to," he said.

"Already we can see where these donations have made a difference. Four analysts would have to wait in line to process evidence before the equipment was given. And things like the autoclave make their instruments immediately available to them," she said.

Thanking her on behalf of SA Forensic Science Lab management, he called the donations a gift for the "community of South Africa" as a whole.

In a recent success for the DNA Project, the divisional commissioner of laboratories in the UK accepted Lynch's proposal to bring teams of scientists to the facility in Pretoria for assessment. Their database in the UK processes some 40 000 reference samples per month. The trip will be sponsored by the DNA Project.

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