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Regional

More rumors arrive in Franke case

mate at the Idaho State Penitentiary said Frank E. Gable told him he killed Oregon corrections chief Michael Francke during a bungled car burglary. The Oregonian reported Friday.

Mike Keerins told the newspaper that Gable told him about the killing when he visited Keerins' house in Salem in February. Gable is now jailed in Coos County on an assault

"It was just a car thing." Keerins told newspaper columnist Phil Stanford. "It was just a fluke, man. He came outside. was in the car. Francke came around the wall and caught Frank in there and tried to hold Frank for the police, and the rest, of course.

Gable, 30, has been a focus of the Francke investigation since September. A source close to the investigation told The Oregonian that Gable made similar claims to his wife, Janyne Vierra-Gable, to another inmate and to Coos County jailers.

A Coos County jailer who identified himself only as Sgt. Jackson told The Associated Press, however, that Gable hadn't made such claims to

Coos County Sheriff Veral Tarno went home for the day

without returning a telephone call for comment.

Keerins said Gable told him Francke's car door was unlocked and that he did not have time to take anything from the

After he did what he did to Mr. Francke, he took off.' Keerins said.

Keerins said the stabbing had no connection with Corrections Department officials. Keerins is serving time in the Idaho State Penitentiary for conviction on charges of second-degree burglary and attempted embezzle-

Francke's brothers have said they believe Francke uncovered elements of corruption in the Corrections Department and his death might be linked to a cov-

Authorities say Francke was attacked about 7 p.m. Jan. 17 near his car outside his office in Salem. An autopsy revealed he died of a stab wound to the heart and that he suffered other wounds, which have not been disclosed.

Francke's body was found on a porch of the building around midnight by a security guard.

Keerins said another Oregon prison inmate questioned in the Francke case, Johnny Lee Crouse, had nothing to do with

has given differing stories about the case and has denied that he was involved in the

He said he has been interviewed by Oregon State Police detectives and they were making preparations to bring him to Oregon.

Jailers in Coos County would not forward calls to Gable on Thursday, and his lawyer, Rick Inokuchi, was in court and couldn't be reached for com-

Gable's foster father. Les Gederos of North Bend, has told KGW-TV in Portland that Gable told him he was not involved with the slaying.

Marion County District Attorney Dale Penn, who is in charge of the Francke investigation, refused to comment on Keerins' statement.

"What I have to say is, I won't comment on who we've talked to and what they've told us." Penn said. He said only that the case is "moving forward '

He would not confirm that investigators have talked with Keerins, although he said investigators had gone to Idaho and other states in connection with the case.

Center to focus on nuclear waste

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) Forty years after nuclear wastes began to be dumped into the soil of the Hanford nuclear reservation, the government is starting to look at just what's brewing under the surface.

The ambitious new Molecular Science Research Center. which some tout as the future for the Hanford plutonium production site, has opened and is already performing experi-

It is a symbol of the U.S. Department of Energy's commitment to cleaning up wastes from the production of nuclear weapons at 17 plants around the country, said Michael Knotek, who left the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York to become manager of the MSRC

Total cost of the cleanup has been estimated anywhere from \$90 billion to \$150 billion.

The country can't afford that," said Knotek, noting that one of the research center's major missions will be to develop technology to reduce cleanup

"We've got to find a permanent solution, one we can af-

ford and everybody will be happy with," he said.

When completed, the facility will be the only one in the nation dedicated exclusively for molecular science research. which is the study of molecules and how they combine to form structures

Such work is currently distributed across the country, and the only comparable facility is in Okazaki, Japan, Knotek said.

Steven Colson, who was recently hired from Yale University to be an associate director, said the MSRC takes molecular research out of a closed setting like a university and into the 'front line.

'We're here on top of a major environmental problem." Colson said. "You don't find that at a university

The specific mission of the research center, which is working on a \$6 million 1990 budget, is to focus on problems of cleaning up the Hanford site.

Hanford since 1943 has produced much of the plutonium for the nation's nuclear arsenal. and is the U.S. Department of Energy's most polluted site. with more than half of the nation's defense wastes.

Much of that waste in the past was dumped directly into the soil, and what it has been doing underground is not known, according to Don Friedrich, who is using lasers to study the underground chemical reactions.

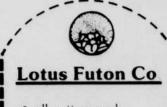
Wastes that could be relatively benign on their own can combine with other subsurface wastes, or with natural elements in the soil, to become very dangerous, Friedrich said.

Also, the danger from some wastes could be reduced by molecular conversion occurring underground, he said.

The laser research is designed to give scientists a clear picture of what is going on beneath the surface, forming a sort of underground weather map of the Hanford site, he

It will help scientists predict how the wastes are changing. in which direction they are traveling, and how fast. Friedrich said

Friedrich is one of about 10 researchers and staff members already working at the center.



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