

# Investigation officials: Rand case is solid

## But D.A. says it's circumstantial in nature

By GLENN CHAPMAN  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

While the Staten Island district attorney said the kidnapping case against Andre Rand is circumstantial in nature, and stressed the need for police and volunteers to ferret out more evidence, officials at the heart of the investigation were confident yesterday that the case is solid.

Authorities attending Rand's arraignment said Criminal Court Judge Alan Meyer commented that the evidence presented could have been used to support stronger charges against the 43-year-old drifter. Judge Meyer arraigned Rand on charges he kidnapped and unlawfully imprisoned Jennifer Schweiger, a missing 12-year-old Westerleigh girl.

Rand was arrested Tuesday night at a storefront church at 1062 Castleton Ave. in West Brighton and charged with second-degree kidnapping and unlawful imprisonment. The drifter had been taken in about a month ago by the church's minister.

Using electronic surveillance techniques and plainclothes detectives, police monitored Rand's movements in the hope he would lead them to Jennifer, or slip up and give them a break in the case.

"The case (against Rand) is good enough. We have good witnesses," one police official said. "If we get more, all the better."

The investigative team assigned to the case has been trimmed to the two detectives, Ralph Aquino and Robert Jensen, who have been handling the core of the case since the girl disappeared from the street near her Wardwell Avenue home July 9.

Aquino and Jensen are continuing to review all the steps taken so far in the hunt, and plan to re-interview several witnesses. The news of Rand's arrest, and the publication of his picture by the press, has resulted in a renewed flurry of telephone calls to police and volunteer groups reporting sightings of the girl and tips about Rand's activities.

Officer Peter O'Donnell, a police spokesman, said that since Rand's arrest, there have been "people calling, women in particular, talking of encounters or conversations with him." None of the stories told by callers involved

any criminal accusations, O'Donnell said.

Rand has a history of crimes against children, including unlawful imprisonment and sexual assault convictions.

Under the direction of Assistant Chief Samuel Marino, commander of the Island's police force, a team of officers specially trained to work on rugged terrain continued to search sections of the Greenbelt for some trace of Jennifer.

Volunteers, more determined than ever to find Jennifer, gathered last night at Holy Family R.C. Church on Watchogue Road in Westerleigh.

"We follow up on everything, no matter how strange it sounds," said Donna Cutugno, coordinator of the volunteer group called the Friends of Jennifer. "You never know what might work out."

The group of 75 volunteers gathered last night was divided into three groups and sent out to search the woods near Manor Road and Rockland Avenue, the thickets behind Crazy Eddie's near Richmond Avenue in New Springville, and lots surrounding Watchogue Road and Bradley Avenue in Meiers Corners.

Bee stings, minor cuts, ticks and poison sumac have plagued volunteers, but the ranks have not thinned.

"If she (Jennifer) is alive, who is taking care of her?" asked Father Henry Gentile, an associate pastor in Holy Family Church. "We need to make a big effort this week to find her."

Volunteer coordinators said enthusiasm has been high since the arrest. They added that the afternoon search effort was "petering out," but that the number of people showing up at night was increasing.

According to Lou Barbato of Westerleigh, who along with his wife and children was out searching last night, the volunteer effort seems stronger than ever.

"There are more new faces tonight than last night, and more last night than the night before," Barbato said. "We need to find something."

Mike Frayler, president of the Youth Activities Association of St. Teresa's R.C. Church, gathered

more than 20 members of the group to join last night's search because they "needed a helping hand."

"I was afraid they would stop," said Kathy O'Shea of West Brighton, who, along with her brother, Frank Reilly, joined the search yesterday. "The parents still need to find their daughter."

Searchers were sent out yesterday with directions to watch out for campsites and bits of discarded clothing.

"Now that we know what kind of man he (Rand) is, we know better what to look for," Mrs. Cutugno said last night.

While volunteers said they were eager to find evidence that would help the case against Rand, they affirmed that their main concern was to find the missing girl, who has Down's syndrome and congenital heart disease.

The volunteer effort has not been confined to the Island's woodlands. Members of the Friends of Jennifer have spent hours in the New Dorp branch of the public library researching the disappearances of 7-year-old Holly Ann Hughes in 1981 and 10-year-old Tiahease Jackson two years later.

Police have cited a possible link between Rand and the disappearances of those girls as well as that of a New Dorp girl in 1972.

Rand has appeared catatonic since his arrest, but Westerleigh residents who have seen the man in the community for years said he is usually alert and responsive.

"He would eat in my place almost every day," said Mike Moudatsos, owner of Mike's Souvlaki King at 1637 Forest Ave. "He used to bring in books and newspapers. We would laugh and joke with him."

Volunteers meet daily at noon and 7 p.m. at the Holy Family Church to search for Jennifer, and a major rally and search is planned for tomorrow's noon gathering. About 400 Vietnam veterans from groups throughout the city are expected to join the search tomorrow, according to Mrs. Cutugno.

Anyone with information concerning Rand or the missing girl is asked to call police at a 24-hour hotline number, 447-4168.