

# Killing not a gay-bashing, police say

by MATTHEW A. HENNIE

A 34-year-old man dressed as a woman when he was shot and killed in Montrose early Feb. 6 was not the victim of a hate crime, according to the Houston Police Department.

Investigators initially labeled the shooting death of Steve Dwayne Garcia, of 3615 Aberham, a possible gay-bashing because the man was wearing women's clothing and jewelry, wore makeup and had shoulder-length hair.

Garcia was shot once in the back about 3:30 a.m. near West Clay, before he stumbled to the 600 block of West Bell near Stanford and collapsed, police said.

Neighbors returning from a party found him about two hours later, authorities said.

But evidence uncovered this week points to a crime motivated by something other than prejudice, said Lt. Mark Eisenman, hate crimes coordinator for the Houston Police Department.

"It doesn't look like there is anything to be alarmed about in the (gay and lesbian) community," Eisenman said Thursday. "At this point, I really don't



Lt. Mark Eisenman

think that the person was a victim because of their sexual orientation."

But with the case still under investigation, Eisenman refused to say what motivated the shooting.

Police have no suspects in the killing, he said.

"We are still looking at a bunch of things," Eisenman said.

After the shooting, a police spokesman said the motive could range from a gay-bashing to robbery or drugs.

"The victim did have some jewelry and money when he was found and that sort of clouds the robbery theory," said John Cannon, a police spokesman. "It is way too early to speculate on why this guy was killed."

Garcia was buried Wednesday at Crespo Funeral Home.

His parents refused to comment earlier this week.

In 1998, Houston police recorded 40 hate crimes, a nearly 30 percent jump over a year earlier, though the actual number of crimes motivated by prejudice remained small, according to figures released recently by the department.

Reported attacks targeting gay men and lesbians reached 10 last year, compared to eight in 1997, police said, making sexual orientation the second-highest category. Other motivations include race (19 in 1998 versus 11 in 1997), religion (seven versus six) and ethnicity or national origin (four versus six), police said.