

## Daughters remain hopeful 25 years after Badaracco disappearance in Sherman

By Dirk Perrefort, Staff Writer

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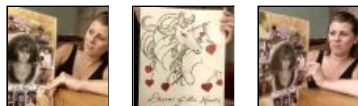
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1 of 3

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Sherrie Passaro, 46, of Danbury holds a poster of photographs in memory of her mother Mary Badaracco, who disappeared from her home 25 years ago this week. Photo taken August 19, 2009. Photo: Carol Kaliff / The News-Times | [Buy This Photo](#)



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DANBURY -- It may be 25 years since Mary Badaracco's disappearance from her Sherman home, but her daughters remain hopeful their mother's killer will be brought to justice.

"We're not going to stop," said Sherrie Passaro, of Danbury. "It's hard to remain positive sometimes, but there is always hope."

A prayer vigil will be held Friday at 7 p.m. in Hatters Park to mark the 25th anniversary of Badaracco's disappearance.

Passaro remembers the last time she saw her mother, about a week before she disappeared Aug. 20, 1984. She had dropped by her mother's house for their weekly dinner outing, and Mary told her she had just come from a meeting with a lawyer.

Mary had recently discovered her husband, Dominic Badaracco Sr., had a girlfriend, Passaro said.

"When he showed up, she became visibly nervous and asked me to leave. She was afraid that something was going to happen if I stayed. She was always very

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protective of us."

**For the first time in the two and a half decades since her mother disappeared, a police official earlier this year named Dominic Badaracco Sr. as the prime suspect in the case.**

**Dominic Badaracco Sr., who still lives in Sherman, could not be reached for comment. His attorney, Richard Meehan of Bridgeport, declined to comment.**

In May, during a trial of city resident Ernest Dachenhausen, who was arrested and eventually found not guilty on charges of interfering with the investigation, Detective Joe Bukowski of the Connecticut State Police Western District Major Crimes Division named Badaracco as the chief suspect.

"My main suspect at this time is Dominic Badaracco Sr., who is the last person to see the victim alive, had a history of extramarital affairs and domestic violence," he

said on the stand in Danbury Superior Court.

At the time of Mary's disappearance, Badaracco told police he last saw his wife before he left for work that day. When he came home she was gone, along with her jewelry, clothes, and a "large sum of money" he kept in the home.

He said at the time that they were about to get divorced, and he wasn't surprised when he didn't hear from her.

Both Passaro and her sister, Beth Profetta of Torrington, said they have concerns about how police handled the early investigation.

"That was the critical time in the investigation," Profetta said.

Their mother's car, which was still at the home and showed signs of distress -- the windshield had been smashed in -- was never impounded. The car has since disappeared.

For years the investigation languished, but from time to time there would appear to be a break in the case, the daughters said.

In 1986, investigators interviewing a former member of the Hell's Angel's Bridgeport chapter told police another member of the organization "had openly talked about hitting Mary Badaracco."

Police said at the time that the gang member fingered by the informant denied any involvement.

Joseph Badaracco, Dominic's son, admitted in past unrelated court proceedings that he had been a member of the motorcycle gang.

In 1990 Mary Badaracco's daughters successfully lobbied state officials to reclassify the case a homicide, and in 1999 the state increased the reward to \$50,000 for information leading to an arrest.

The case began to pick up steam about five years ago, when Bukowski took on the investigation. The daughters often refer to the detective as their hero.

"Finally, some real police work was being done," Profetta said.

In 2006 Bukowski interviewed Lee Jupina, identified by authorities as a career criminal.

Jupina told the detective he had overheard Dachenhausen talking about burying a car for Badaracco, according to testimony during the trial earlier this year.

The alleged conversation took place at Abe's bar in Danbury, which authorities said Dominic used as a base of operations for taking bets on sporting events.

That lead took investigators to the backyard of a home in Newtown that Dachenhausen owned in the 1980s.

Investigators excavated the property in September 2007 and removed several vehicles, as well



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as other materials buried there. None of the cars, however, was the 1982 Chevy Cavalier station wagon Mary Badaracco had owned.

At the time of the excavation, Dachenhausen, who has said he knows nothing about the woman's disappearance, told The News-Times police "were wasting their time."

He also said police were wasting their time in September 2008, when they performed ground-penetrating radar tests at a home in New Fairfield built the month after Badaracco's disappearance.

Joseph Novella, a local developer who built the home near Ball Pond, said last fall that police had contacted him and asked about subcontractors who had worked on the site.

The short list of contractors, Novella said, included Dachenhausen and relatives of Dominic Badaracco.

The case has also recently been added to the Web site of the TV show "America's Most Wanted." Relatives of Mary Badaracco hope the attention will help bring someone forward.

"With good police work and people coming forward, we can solve this case," Profetta said.

"There are all these grandchildren who never knew the love of their grandmother. Someone has some explaining to do."

Sgt. Chris Johnson, a spokesman for the state police, said they continue to actively pursue any lead in the case that emerges.

"The case is active, and there have been some leads in the case that major crime squad detectives are pursuing," he said. "We are always looking for witnesses we know are out there or anyone who may be additional information the case."

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