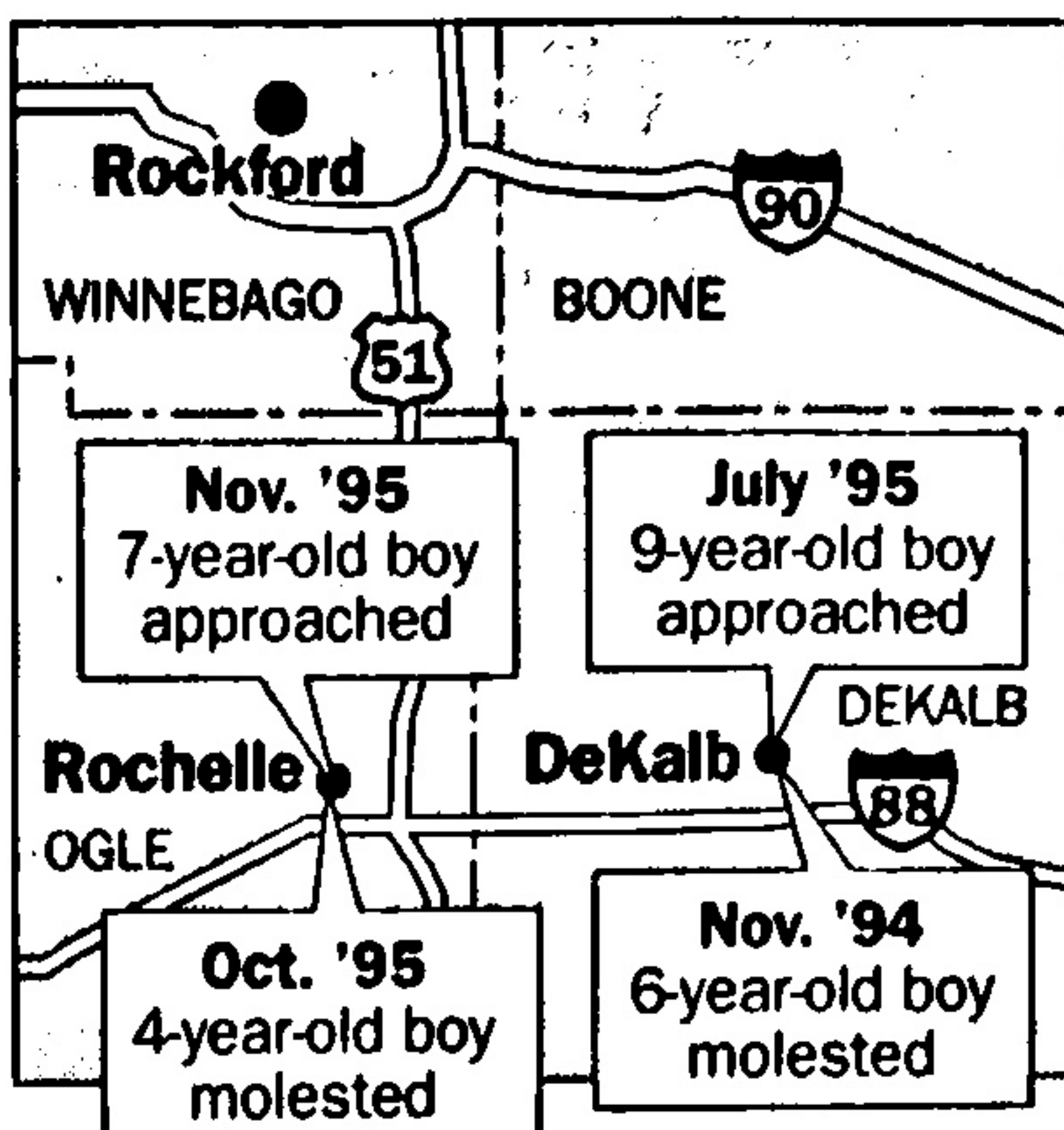
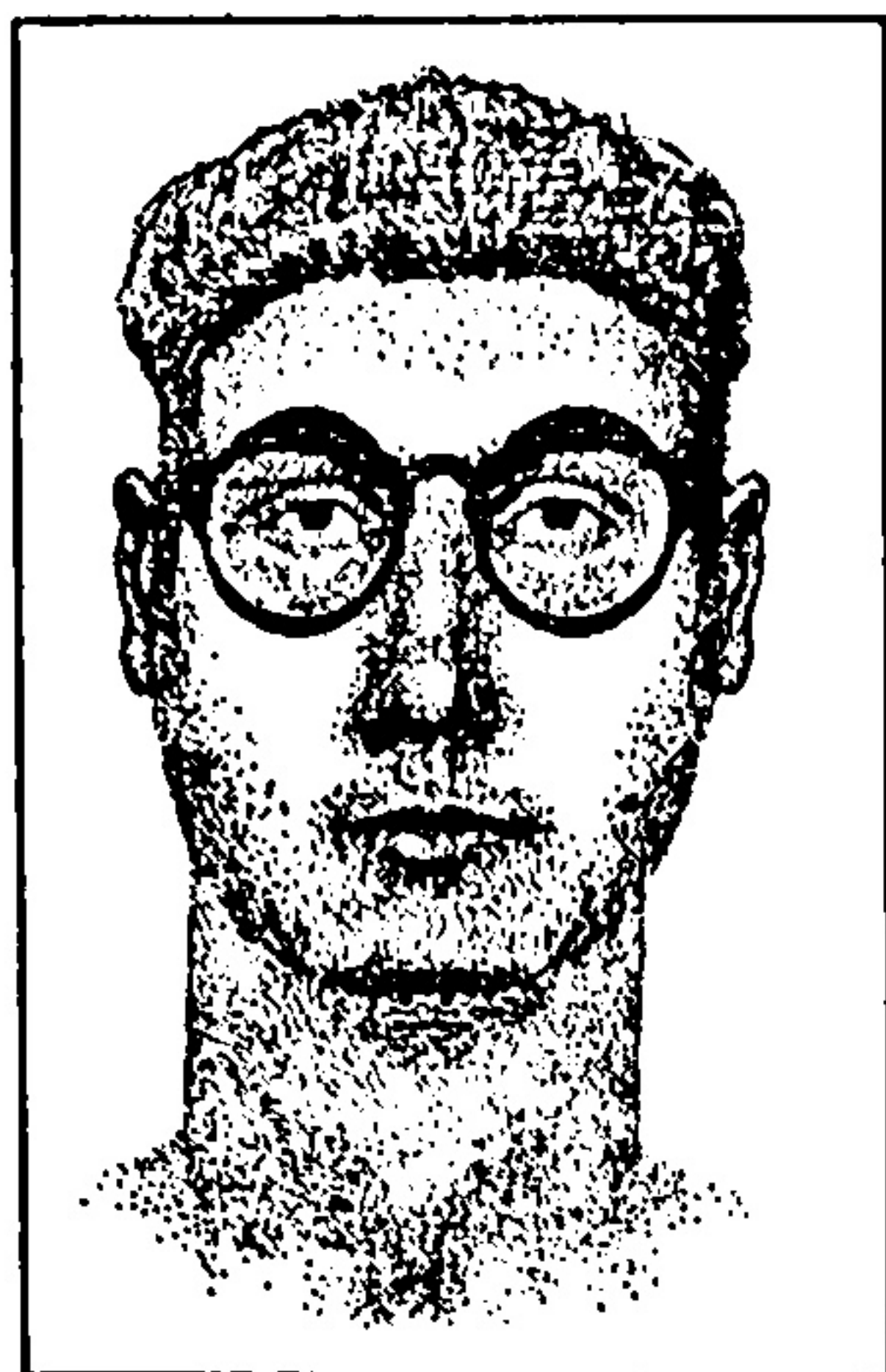


Where to call

If you have any information about the Wal-Mart incidents or the suspect, call Ogle County CrimeStoppers (Rochelle) at **562-5000** or DeKalb County CrimeStoppers at **895-3272**. All callers may remain anonymous.



The suspect

Described as a man in his 20s or 30s with a dark complexion, he is about 5-foot-10 with an average build of about 180 pounds. He has been seen wearing round glasses and sometimes a mustache with a goatee-style beard, as well as with blond hair and dark hair. At one Wal-Mart, he asked an employee to direct him to the department with men's hair dye.

WILL PFEIFER / The Register Star

Police hunt serial child molester

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The incidents in DeKalb, about 15 miles east of Rochelle, occurred in November 1994 and July 1995. A 6-year-old was molested, but a 9-year-old got away.

Each time, a parent or grandparent accompanied the child to the store, but then left the youngster alone in the toy department while shopping elsewhere.

The problem raised questions about security at Wal-Mart stores, but a spokeswoman defended the security procedures.

"We're top of the line when it comes to security," said Shelly Gallardo, a regional Wal-Mart manager. She and other Wal-Mart officials declined to elaborate on the company's security measures.

In both Rochelle and DeKalb, security cameras inside the stores failed to record the attacks. Rochelle police say a video-recording mechanism had been left turned off in that store. They also say there was no camera positioned over the toy department.

Gorr said security video might have helped police identify the suspect.

He said he believes Wal-Mart officials have since improved security.

Wal-Mart has 2,234 stores nationally. More than 100 are located in Illinois, including two in

Winnebago County.

DeKalb Police Chief Don Berke said the two attacks in that community were "undoubtedly" perpetrated by the same person. Police developed a composite sketch of the molester and questioned a couple of suspects. Rochelle police have compared notes with investigators in DeKalb.

Berke said no incidents have been reported in DeKalb since last summer.

"Does that mean the person isn't doing it anymore?" he said. "Not at all. He could be doing it elsewhere."

Managers at both Wal-Marts in Winnebago County said they have not heard reports of children being stalked in their toy departments.

They also had not been alerted to the problem in Rochelle and DeKalb.

At the East State Street store in Rockford, police recently conducted a "Child Safety Week." Children were fingerprinted for their parents and reminded about the importance of not talking to strangers.

Store manager Jack Vater said children frequently wander away from their parents in a large department store. "Kids will be kids," he said. "One minute they're on your side, and one minute they're not."