

Collier County Sheriff's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1977 John Doe

After nearly five decades, investigators have identified a man whose remains were found by land surveyors while cutting a property line in Collier County, Florida.

Solved

Summary

In July 1977, the skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were discovered by land surveyors while cutting a property line in Collier County, Florida, just south of Fort Myers near State Road 951. Investigators arrived at the scene and determined that the remains were that of a white male who stood 5'11" tall and was between 35 and 55 years of age. Two gold chains were around the man's neck, one with a cross that appeared to be handmade, and one with an Italian pepper. The man was also wearing a small "Sears" knit button-up shirt, blue jeans, Jockey-type shorts, socks, and a leather belt.

In April 2008, the case was entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case number UP1325. Despite continuous efforts by law enforcement to identify the man, no leads yielded a match and the man's identity remained a mystery.



In 2023, the Collier County Sheriff's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas to determine if advanced DNA testing could help identify the man. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the forensic evidence, and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive genealogical profile for the unknown man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used this profile to conduct extensive genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing new investigative leads to law enforcement.

1st Body Identified, 2nd Still Mystery

By JOE KOLLEN
Staff Writer

A man whose body was found in the woods Sunday night with two bullets in the head today was identified by the sheriff's department as a 30-year-old scheduled for trial next month on a charge of manufacturing marijuana.

Deputy Chief E.S. "Chuck" Whidden said the murder victim is Mark Edwin Schneider of Copeland. His identity was confirmed by a fingerprint match.

MANVILLE, WOODEN said the investigation remains an ongoing attempt to learn the identity of a slasher Monday afternoon.

Schneider's body, found by police, was lying face down in about six feet of water in the woods near Royal Palm Home north on the Tamiami Trail east of Naples. The medical examiner later found two small caliber holes in the head, Whidden said. Schneider had been dead about 24 hours.

Schneider, 3 feet 7 and 130 pounds, was arrested by Deputies of the sheriff's department's Manatee County station May 28 after they said they saw him manufacturing a large marijuana plant.

AT THE TIME of the arrest, he gave his occupation as a

The marijuana plant was seized off State Road 28 north of Copeland, about 20 miles from where the body was found. Whidden today said he

manufacture plants were found near the body. Asked if Schneider's murder might be connected to marijuana or drugs, Whidden replied, "No comment." He said an investigation is under way to sub the victim.

SCHNEIDER HAD been free on a \$200 money bond posted for him following his arrest. He had pleaded innocent to the charge of manufacturing marijuana and had been scheduled for a July trial on Aug. 9.

According to court records in his case, deputies had discovered a growth containing "marijuana harvested marijuana plants" on the area north of Copeland. The plants were about 18 inches high. The deputies seized the marijuana for several days. Then, at 8:30 a.m. on May 28, the deputies said they arrived and began working on the plants, destroying some of them. Two deputies found it and arrested him.

Booked into the county jail on a \$200 bond, the amount was returned later in the day when he appeared before a judge. It was posted

for him the following day and he was released from jail.

ON JULY 16, he appeared

back in court, pleaded innocent and had his trial date set. The public defender's office was representing him.

Manatee County investigators would identify the body Monday. In addition to its identity, they don't know the cause of death. Whidden said the specimen has been turned over to be medical examiner.

He said he believes the body has been dead for over a year and may have been a child — it had 20 to 25 teeth — that were between 20 and 30 years old.

The body was covered with the natural brush growing in the area and was found by deputies. It was located off State Road 881 near the junction of Golden Gate.

Investigators are checking missing person reports filed with the sheriff's department during the last three years in an attempt to find someone reported missing who fits the description. Positive identification may come from a dental comparison — the teeth had a "file of filings," Whidden said.

Two teeth were found on the body, both gold. One with a crown that appears to be hand made. The other was originally identified as having a fork set. But when examined, Whidden said it is an Italian pepper, an ornament worn by many.



Whidden holds clues to identity.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the man. This investigation led to the positive identification of the man. At the request of the agency, the identity of the man will not be released at this time.

Grant funding provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for the use of Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy in UHR cases was awarded to Collier County Sheriff's Office, allowing this case to be solved.

We would like to thank Senator Jennifer Bradley and her colleagues in the legislature for fighting for dollars for law enforcement agencies to help them solve these important cases.