

Riverside District Attorney's Office Leverages Othram's Genetic Testing Platform to Identify a 1994 Homicide Victim

The murdered woman, found in 1994, was buried in a shallow grave and remained unidentified for 27 years

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Summary

In October 1994, an unidentified woman was found buried in a shallow grave near Thousand Palms, California. At the time of the discovery, the Coroner's Office used all available resources to identify the victim, including having her DNA entered into the California Department of Justice Missing and Unidentified Persons System, but no identification was able to be made. With conventional STR testing not producing leads and other leads and tips exhausted, the case soon went cold.

In 2021, the Riverside District Attorney's Office contracted Othram to use advanced DNA testing to produce new leads in the case that might lead to the identity of the homicide victim or at least a close family member. Othram's laboratory team used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to produce a comprehensive DNA profile. This profile was delivered to investigators with the Riverside DA's Cold Case Team who used it to perform a genealogical search to find genetic relatives. Using the results of this search, the Riverside Cold Case Team was able to identify a candidate genetic relative – one of her children. The Cold Case Team was able to find the biological child and a DNA sample was submitted to the California Missing and Unidentified Persons System. The parent-child relationship was confirmed, suggesting that in fact, the unidentified woman was Patricia Cavallaro, born March 22, 1937. She is suspected to be a homicide victim and an investigation into her death continues.