

# Farmington Hills family pleads for tips in 1975 death

[Candice Williams](#), The Detroit News Published 8:06 p.m. ET March 8, 2017 | Updated 10:12 a.m. ET March 9, 2017



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For more than 40 years, the family of 15-year-old Darlene McKenzie wondered what happened to the girl after she left her west-side Detroit home following an argument.

They got answers to some of their questions in December, when DNA provided by her family was tied to a 1975 Farmington Hills case in which an unidentified young female had been found strangled near an expressway.

On Wednesday, the case moved again into the public eye when Crime Stoppers of Michigan announced a \$2,500 reward for information leading to an arrest.

“I have been looking for my mom pretty much as long as I’ve been an adult,” said Carlita Ransom, 43, during a Crime Stoppers news conference at the Farmington Hills Police Department.

“This has been a very hard and challenging time for me and my family. I ask that anyone that has any information to please, please contact the authorities. We need closure for this that happened to my mom. I pray that someone has it on their heart to step forward and talk.”



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Darlene Rene McKenzie. (Photo: Max Ortiz / The Detroit News)

Ransom, who was a baby at the time of her mother’s disappearance, was joined by family members including McKenzie’s mother, Doris Leverett, 79.

“It has been a long, long journey,” Leverett said. “And no one knows any better than I do what a heavy load it can be on your heart when you have a child and you don’t know where that child is or if that child is alive.”

On June 10, 1975, workers from the Farmington Hills Department of Public Works found the remains of a female in the area of Interstate 696 east of Haggerty.

The case generated public interest and several tips at the time, said Farmington Hills Police Chief Chuck Nebus.

“There was a lot of work that went on that never really resulted in anything substantial,” he said.

The Police Department collected a blood sample and about a month later “Jane Doe” was buried.

Nebus said the case was reopened every few years. The blood evidence was submitted to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).

The puzzle began to come together in 2015 when Ransom and Leverett sought help from the Detroit Police Department and submitted DNA samples.

“We didn’t have the actual report that may have been taken back in ’75 when she went missing, but it didn’t stop us,” said Detroit police Sgt. Shannon Jones. “Anytime it’s somebody missing, no matter what year, when somebody comes and asks for our help to try to find them, we do whatever we can do.”

In 2016, Farmington Hills police Detective Chad Double received an email from the University of North Texas, which is affiliated with NamUs. Blood from an old vial had a possible match, but more evidence was needed. In October 2016, the unidentified body of the 1975 slaying victim was exhumed and the family learned in December 2016 that it was McKenzie’s body that was buried as the Jane Doe.

“It’s bittersweet,” said Leverett, who had spent hours driving around the city searching for her daughter. “It’s a hurt that lasts a long time.”

Leverett said her daughter liked to style hair, fashion and dancing. McKenzie attended Detroit Job Corps on East Jefferson.

At the time of her disappearance, McKenzie’s hair had an orange hue and she wore white or pink nail polish, Double said. Family last saw her when she left home at 19000 Muirland.

“She did leave the home in some kind of family argument on a night,” Double said. “They talked to her briefly on the phone and they didn’t see her anymore after that. We don’t have much to go on. There’s a lot of work we gotta do. That why we’re asking the public to help. Maybe they remember something we don’t know. And anything the public can offer, even if they think it’s something that might not help, hopefully they contact us so we can follow up on anything.”

Authorities believe the slaying may have taken place in Detroit and McKenzie’s body left in Farmington Hills, Nebus said.

“We in law enforcement we don’t give up,” he said. “If it’s a loved one that was murdered yesterday, or a month ago, or in this case almost 42 years. We never give up. We always stay determined to try to get justice for a family.”

Anyone with information is asked to call the Farmington Hills Police Department at (248) 871-2610 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-Speak Up. Tips can remain anonymous.

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