

- **Dead man found in Washington state, who had ties to N.M., ID'd through DNA** By Sami Edge | sedge@sfnewmexican.com
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Drawing of Lyle Stevik by forensic artist Diana Trepkov.

A young man who died alone in a Washington state motel room almost 17 years ago, booking the room under a pseudonym and leaving behind no identification after taking his own life, finally has been identified, with the help of internet sleuths who determined his DNA showed ties to Northern New Mexico.

Known for years only as “Lyle Stevik,” the man was identified as a 25-year-old from Alameda County, Calif., said Steve Shumate, chief criminal deputy for the Grays Harbor County Sheriff’s Office in Washington, where the man died in 2001.

The agency has not released the man’s name. According to a news release from the sheriff’s office Tuesday, family members asked that his identity remain confidential.

But as it turns out, one of the man’s grandparents was from Rio Arriba County, according to co-founders of the DNA Doe Project, a nonprofit that works to track down the identities of deceased John and Jane Does.

In the Stevik case, which in the past decade has drawn the interest of thousands of people online who have been trying to uncover his identify, DNA Doe Project investigators worked with Grays Harbor authorities earlier this year to have the man’s DNA samples sent to a lab for genome sequencing. Then they compared the man’s genetic information with that on a website containing information from people who have undergone genetic testing.

According to his DNA, the John Doe was likely at least one-quarter Native American and one-quarter Spanish or Hispanic. His closest DNA matches were clustered mostly Northern New Mexico, with some in Idaho.

Volunteers with the nonprofit, who spent hundreds of hours sorting through and looking up Stevik's potential DNA matches, eventually traced the man's relatives to California. Their leads led to an identification.

Margaret Press, co-founder of the DNA Doe Project, said Tuesday she is "amazed" at the outcome.

"You feel so grateful that you have the skills to reunite the person with their family," added the project's other co-founder, Colleen Fitzpatrick.

One of the difficulties of cracking the case was trying to untangle a complicated web of potential relatives, caused by intermarriages among families in Northern New Mexico.

Eventually, a project volunteer found a potential relative who knew of a family member who had been missing for more than a decade. That led the volunteers to the name of the man who had disappeared in California.

After they were confident they'd found Stevik's identity, staff of the DNA Doe Project drafted a 14-page report and submitted it to the Grays Harbor County Sheriff's Office, which had continued to work on the case.

The sheriff's office confirmed the man's identity through fingerprints provided by the California family, the agency said in a news release.

The revelation wasn't necessarily a joyous one.

According to the news release, the man's family had believed he was still alive, but that he didn't want to associate with them.

“You can say you bring closure to those people, but we’ve been told not to use that word,” Fitzpatrick said, “because sometimes there is no closure.”

“We bring answers to them,” Press said. “I think that’s a better way of putting it. There’s an answer, and that’s not always going to make them happy. The flipside of knowing is that they no longer have hope.”

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