

Ottawa County Sheriff's Office: 1994 cold case victim identified



Photo by: Ottawa County Sheriff's Office



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WRIGHT TOWNSHIP, Mich. — The Ottawa County Sheriff's Office says investigators have identified the victim of a 1994 cold case.

In November 1994, a woman's skeletal remains were found by hunters at the dead-end of 32nd Avenue, south of Arthur Street, in Wright Township near Coopersville.

A forensic autopsy determined the manner of death to be a homicide.

The Ottawa County Sheriff's Office says they called the victim Matilda since then as they weren't able to positively identify her.

A DNA profile was obtained in 2007 but the victim still wasn't identified because she was not in the CODIS database, according to the sheriff's office.

In February 2021, the Ottawa County Cold Case Team began working on this investigation with help from the DNA Doe Project along with federal, state and local law enforcement partners.

In September 2021 detectives traveled to Minnesota to make contact with the family of missing person Shelly Rae Kephart, also known as Shelly Rae Christian.

The 29-year-old went missing from Minnesota in 1993.

The Ottawa County Sheriff's Office says DNA samples taken from Kephart's family were compared to the DNA profile obtained from the 1994 homicide victim known as Matilda.

Matilda was positively identified as Shelly Rae Kephart.

The sheriff's office says they remain hopeful that the identification of Kephart will provide closure for the family and offer investigative direction for cold case detectives.