

Woman's remains identified 27 years after disappearance

Remains of 78-year-old Gainesville woman found in 2001, authorities say

By [Elizabeth Campbell](#) - Reporter

Posted: 10:22 AM, November 16, 2017 Updated: 11:20 PM, November 16, 2017

GAINESVILLE, Fla. - A family that has waited 27 years to learn what became of their 78-year-old loved one who disappeared from a Gainesville neighborhood can finally lay her to rest after local and state investigators positively identified the woman's remains, authorities said Thursday.

Ella Mae Williams, who suffered from dementia, was reported missing when she didn't return to her home on Southeast 20th Street on March 25, 1990.

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Detectives from the [Alachua County Sheriff's Office](#) and [Gainesville Police Department](#) Cold Case, working with officials from the [Florida Department of Law Enforcement](#), were recently able to identify remains found in March 2001 near Payne's Prairie -- about two miles from her home -- as Williams.

"Thanks to our agents, lab analysts, Alachua County Sheriff's Office and Gainesville Police Department for working to resolve this case and provide answers to her family," said FDLE Jacksonville Special Agent in Charge John Burke.

Working with FDLE agents and the FDLE Biology/DNA Lab, analysts were able to compare DNA patterns obtained from the remains with patterns of other potential family members and statistically link these individuals to each other.

"We're grateful for the detectives," Williams' granddaughter, Lynne Jackson Stevens said. "Oh my goodness ... I can't thank them enough, what they've done for us, this family. They worked tirelessly and intensely on this."

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Jackson and another granddaughter, Nuguana Cowvins, said this news will help them go into the holidays with a new sense of peace and lots of stories about Williams to their her great-great grandchildren.

"When we were little kids, if you were ripping and running around and it was raining or lightning, she would just make you stop, standstill, wherever you were and sit down and say, 'Shut up. Don't you hear the Lord talking?'" Cowvins said.

While Williams' remains have been identified, the investigation is still ongoing while a cause of death is determined.

Sheriff Sadie Darnell has hired a full-time cold case detective at the Sheriff's Office and said they will never give up on identifying a victim or solving a crime, it just takes time, energy, resources and expertise.

"I truly believe that each of these cold cases deserves attention to bring families and victims resolution," Darnell said. "With technology advances and persistence, we will continue to pursue these cold cases and make sure they receive our undivided attention."

Gainesville Police Chief Tony Jones agreed that cold case detective work is essential.

"We cannot forget these victims" Jones said. "We owe it to the victims, their friends and families to work every lead until these cold cases are solved. I'm proud that the Gainesville Police Department, Alachua County Sheriff's Office and Florida Department of Law Enforcement can allocate the appropriate resources to continue these investigations."

Detectives also worked with and continue to work with the University of Florida C. A. Pound Lab as they close out the case and continue investigating others.

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