

# Collier County: Tennessee man named victim of 40-year-old unsolved cold case

*Collier County Sheriff's Office named James Leander Sanders, 32, of Tennessee as the victim of a 40-year-old, unsolved*

*homicide Friday, Aug. 27, 2021. Sanders' remains were discovered in Immokalee Feb. 3, 1981 after he originally disappeared*

*in 1978. Credit: Collier County Sheriff's Office.*



Investigators were able to use a man's tooth and modern DNA technology to name him as the victim of a decades-old, unsolved homicide.

Collier County Sheriff's Office recently learned 32-year-old James Leander Sanders of Tennessee is the victim of a 40-year-old cold case.

"This important development was made possible thanks to DNA technology and the dedication of everyone involved in this investigation," Sheriff Kevin Rambosk said in [the press release shared on Facebook](#).

According to the CCSO Facebook post, Feb. 3, 1981, skeletal remains of a man — now known to be Sanders' — wrapped in an electric blanket were discovered at a remote site in Immokalee. No identification was found with the remains, which investigators believed had been out in the elements for months.

While an autopsy determined the man died from blunt force trauma to his head, investigators at the time were unable to identify him or develop any viable suspects.

In 2019, CCSO homicide detectives took another look at the case to try to find evidence that could be examined using modern DNA technology. A tooth from the victim was submitted to DNA Labs International, which after analyses, obtained a partial DNA profile in February 2020. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement entered the partial profile into CODIS, the FBI's national database for DNA. Additional bone was submitted to the University of North Texas for similar testing in October 2020, while detectives continued to wait for a CODIS match.

The wait ended Tuesday.

Detectives received notification from UNT that the DNA matched that of Sanders' relatives that was on file. The Rutherford County Sheriff's Office in Tennessee had obtained DNA from Sanders' brother, sister and two children in 2015 and entered their profiles into the "Relatives of Missing Persons" index within the CODIS system.

Sanders was 32 when he last seen Jan. 1, 1978 at a bus stop in Tennessee on his way to North Carolina, where he planned to work at an aunt's tobacco farm. But he changed his mind at the last minute and decided to hitch a ride rather than spend his cash on a bus ticket. Sanders never arrived at his aunt's farm and was never heard from again.

"Without the combined efforts of multiple agencies, Mr. Sanders would still be unidentified after 40 years," Rambosk said. "Now that our victim has a name, the homicide investigation can continue to be actively worked."