

1977 John Doe Identified Using Genetic Genealogy

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Charles Destefano. Courtesy of Collier County Sheriff's Office

In July 1977, the skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were discovered by land surveyors while cutting a property line in Collier County, Florida, just south of Fort Myers near State Road 951. Investigators arrived at the scene and determined that the remains were that of a white male who stood 5'11" tall and was between 35 and 55 years of age. Two gold chains were around the man's neck, one with a cross that appeared to be handmade, and one with an Italian pepper. The man was also wearing a small "Sears" knit button-up shirt, blue jeans, Jockey-type shorts, socks, and a leather belt.

In April 2008, the case was entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case number UP1325. Despite continuous efforts by law enforcement to identify the man, no leads yielded a match and the man's identity remained a mystery.

In 2023, the Collier County Sheriff's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas to determine if advanced DNA testing could help identify the man. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the forensic evidence, and

then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive genealogical profile for the unknown man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used this profile to conduct extensive genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing new investigative leads to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the man. This investigation led to the positive identification of **Charles Destefano**, who was last known to be alive on the east coast of Florida in 1976.

Grant funding provided by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for the use of Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy in UHR cases was awarded to Collier County Sheriff's Office, allowing this case to be solved.

We would like to thank Senator Jennifer Bradley and her colleagues in the legislature for fighting for dollars for law enforcement agencies to help them solve these important cases.

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