

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement and District 16 Medical Examiner's Office Team with Othram to Identify a 2017 John Doe

After nine years, the remains of a man found after Hurricane Irma have been identified as James Schlake, born in 1940.

Solved



Summary

In September 2017, the remains of an unidentified man wearing a life jacket were found in the wake of Hurricane Irma in Big Pine, a rural area of Monroe County, Florida. The Monroe County Sheriff's Office responded and began collecting evidence and investigating. They determined the remains were an adult man, between the ages of 45 and 75 years old, who stood about 5' 10" tall and weighed an estimated 115 lbs and had been dead about four days. He had gray or partially gray hair and a short beard and mustache that were gray to almost white. Following an

autopsy, the Monroe County Medical Examiner determined the cause of death to be drowning and ruled the manner of death accidental.



Despite a lengthy investigation, the man could not be identified and became known as Monroe County John Doe. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP17238.

Recently, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the District 16 Medical Examiner's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement 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 provided evidence and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop new investigative leads that were returned to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the man. Reference DNA samples were collected from a relative and compared to the DNA profile of the unidentified man. This investigation led to the positive identification of the man, who is now known to be **James Donald Schlake**, born December 17, 1940.

"FDLE's Key West Field Office and Forensic Services turned over every stone to identify Mr. Schlake," said FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass. "Our statewide forensic resources and strong partnerships are critical to supporting Florida's communities and law enforcement agencies. This collaboration helped bring long-awaited answers to Mr. Schlake's loved ones and to the Florida Keys community."

FDLE Forensics secured funding for the identification through the State Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy Grant Fund on behalf of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office and the Monroe County Medical Examiner. 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.

This is the 49th publicly announced case in the State of Florida where officials leveraged Othram's identity inference pipeline. Explore other cases on [Othram's website](#).