

Joseph Daniel Pierce of St. Louis, MO Identified

Mahwah, N.J.-The Ramapo College of New Jersey [Investigative Genetic Genealogy \(IGG\) Center](#) has successfully uncovered the identity of “St. Louis John Doe,” now known to be Joseph Daniel Pierce of St. Louis, MO.

Pierce was 23 years old when his remains were found in 2012. The [St. Louis City Medical Examiner’s Office](#) attempted to identify him with traditional means but his name remained a mystery.

It was at the Missing and Unidentified Persons Conference held in May 2023 where a member of the St. Louis City Medical Examiner’s Office attended a presentation given by David Gurney and Cairenn Binder of the Ramapo College Investigative Genetic Genealogy Center about how investigative genetic genealogy helps human identification.

Timeline from Case Referral to Identification

- The St. Louis City MEO referred Pierce’s case to the Ramapo IGG Center on May 12, 2023.
- A blood card for St. Louis John Doe was sent to Intermountain Forensics in May.
- Extraction was completed by sequencing in July and bioinformatics were performed in August by Intermountain Forensics.
- John Doe’s SNP profile was uploaded to the GEDmatch database in early September.
- Genetic genealogy was performed by Cairenn Binder, director of the IGG certificate program at Ramapo College IGG Center, in the days that followed and a candidate, Joseph Daniel Pierce, was presented to the agency on September 5.
- John Doe’s identity was confirmed as Joseph Daniel Pierce by St. Louis City MEO on October 5.

Pierce, from Texas, was loved and missed by his family without any idea about his whereabouts or whether he was alive or dead for more than a decade. St. Louis City MEO Executive Director of Operations Tara Rick could not give up on this case and shared, “Over the past eleven years, the family and what they must be going through never left my mind. I’m honored to have been part of the team able to restore

Joseph's name. I am thankful to the RCNJ IGG Center for their partnership and collaboration with Intermountain Forensics to resolve this case.”

Pierce's mother also hopes sharing this story encourages others to upload DNA to databases to help solve cases like her son's. “The genetic genealogy in this case was straightforward due to the presence of one of John Doe's relatives in the GEDmatch database. Thanks to that family member, we were able to quickly provide an investigative lead and ultimately restore Mr. Pierce's name,” said Binder.



IGG combines traditional genealogy and genetic genealogy to provide investigative leads in cases involving violent crime and unidentified human remains. IGG can also be used to help exonerate the wrongfully convicted. The first of its kind in the nation, the IGG Center [opened in December of 2022](#) and trains students to become proficient and ethical practitioners using IGG to resolve cases involving violent crime, unidentified human remains, and wrongful convictions. More than 20 cases from across the United States have been accepted since the center opened.

The Ramapo College IGG Center is grateful for the collaborative work conducted with the St. Louis City Medical Examiner's Office as well as Intermountain Forensics, who performed DNA extraction and sequencing, and Qiagen/Verogen for use of their databases.

For more information about Ramapo College and the IGG Center, visit ramapo.edu/igg.