

H.B. case helps highlight county's push to find missing people and ID remains



Tiffany Williams, senior deputy coroner, with Bruce Lyle, assistant chief deputy coroner, left, sheriff's Lt. Jeff Hallock and Allison O'Neal, supervising deputy coroner, appear at a media event Tuesday at the Orange County Sheriff's Department about the county's effort to find missing people and identify anonymous remains. (Scott Smeltzer / HB Independent)
Anthony Clark Carpio

The Orange County Sheriff's Department and the coroner's office are asking the public to help them build and update a database intended to find missing people and identify remains in the county and around the nation.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, the Sheriff's Department will open the doors of its Santa Ana headquarters to families of missing people. Relatives are being asked to bring medical and dental records or volunteer for a cheek swab for DNA to help the coroner's office identify about 100 John and Jane Does. The headquarters is at 1071 W. Santa Ana Blvd.

"We have missing persons reports not only through the Sheriff's Department but throughout Orange County," sheriff's Lt. Jeff Hallock said during a media event Tuesday. "All of the municipal police agencies will come together. We have missing people and missing people reports, and then we have unidentified remains or bones, and the whole foundation of Saturday is to fill in that gap. And that gap is the DNA."

The Sheriff's Department has about 1,200 unsolved missing person reports.

On Tuesday, the Sheriff's Department highlighted a case that was solved in April when officials identified a man who went missing 23 years ago.

In July 1992, Percy Ray Carson, 26, of Long Beach was seen struggling in the water off Bolsa Chica State Beach in Huntington Beach. Dive teams couldn't find Carson, said Tiffany Williams, senior deputy coroner for the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

In September that year, a human femur was found on the sand in Seal Beach. An anthropologist said the bone appeared to have been in the water for two months. However, due to limitations in technology at the time, there was no definitive conclusion that the bone belonged to the missing man, Williams said.

In recent years, the coroner's office has made a push to identify anonymous remains and reopened Carson's case. With assistance from the Huntington Beach Police Department, the coroner's office in April got DNA samples from Carson's mother and two sisters, Williams said.

Officials matched the bone's DNA to that of Carson's family members.

"The family was very grateful and thankful that we had not forgotten about Percy Ray Carson," Williams said.

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