

## UPDATED: 1985 Kankakee cold case becomes a homicide investigation

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KANKAKEE — A missing person case dating back to August 1985 has now become a homicide investigation, according to the Kankakee Police Department.

In a news release issued Wednesday, police said remains of a woman found in eastern Kankakee County many years ago were identified using DNA from family members in November 2020 as being those of Jannette Johnson.

Johnson, a 29-year-old mother of two and Kankakee resident, was reported missing on Aug. 3, 1985, by her family.

On the evening of Aug. 2, Johnson's family members saw her pull in and park in the rear of her residence, according to the news release. The following morning her vehicle was located in front of the residence on the street, witnesses said.

A window was partially rolled down, her purse and other personal items were inside, but Johnson was missing, police and witnesses reported. There have been no suspects identified in her disappearance, according to police.

Kankakee police are now seeking any information from anyone in the community who over the years may have heard rumors or have firsthand knowledge of Johnson's disappearance and death.

"It is our hope that someone in the community will come forward after all these years with information that allows us to close this tragic case," the release said.

A phone call

Johnson's daughter, Joretha (Wills) Hampton said Kankakee Police Detective Logan Andersen contacted her last November regarding her mother's case. It was then that she learned the remains found in late 1985 in eastern Kankakee County were indeed those of her mother.

"Detective Anderson called and said he wanted to talk to my grandmother [Mary Moore] and me," Hampton said Wednesday during an interview. "He said he wanted to sit down and talk."

Hampton said it took a few days to collect herself and start contacting family members, including Moore and Hampton's brother Jerry Wills Jr.

Johnson was back in the area again recently to meet with Kankakee Police Sgt. Logan Andersen.

As part of the re-opening of the investigation, KPD will be coordinating with the Missing Persons Awareness Network and Johnson's family and friends to conduct a thorough search of the area where Johnson's remains were recovered. The search is planned to take place in late September.

According to Wednesday's press release from police, family members, friends and witnesses have been located and re-interviewed over the past nine months.

Investigators have had many leads over the years as to a possible reason for Johnson's disappearance but none have provided enough information to make an arrest, according to the release. Kankakee Police Chief Robin Passwater said he would not comment further on the case at this time.

Not giving up

Moore died in February. Three days before she passed, Hampton talked with her regarding the continued search for answers in Johnson's death.

"She said she was at peace and that God chose me to take this to the end," Hampton said.