

Remains discovered in rural Hendricks County property identified as Indianapolis man missing since 1988.

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INDIANAPOLIS — The mystery of human remains found inside a large metal tank on a rural Hendricks County property has been solved.

Discovering the remains

A property owner just outside Brownsburg was working to clear the property just across the Marion- Hendricks County line in July 2013 when a scrapper opened the metal container to dispose of it. When the scrapper cut a hole in the well pump tank to remove debris, he noticed bones and a sock.

Coroner: Tank with human bones inside may have been dumped

A team of law enforcement officials responded to the scene to recover the remains. Along with the remains, officials found a pair of Reebok shoes and a distinctive hat with the logo “Appalachian Mechanical” on it.

Anthropologists at the University of Indianapolis analyzed the bones and determined them to belong to a Caucasian or Hispanic man who was 40-60 years old at the time of his death.

Detectives hope you'll recognize hat, identify man's bones

DNA helps break case

A bone from the remains was sent to a Texas Lab in 2018 in an attempt to extract DNA. The University of North Texas Center for Human Identification. The center performs forensic genetic and anthropological examinations for criminal casework and missing person identification.

On June 7, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department learned DNA from the bones matched samples from one of their cases.

The case dates back to April 19, 1988, when Norma Turner went to the Indiana State Police because she had not seen or been in touch with her ex-husband, John E. Turner. He was last seen on April 11, 1988, a week after Easter Monday.

More than three decades later, a detective with the IMPD's missing person's division contacted John's daughter and grandson to collect DNA samples. These samples were sent to the University of North Texas.

How genealogical investigators are using your DNA to solve cold cases

The University of North Texas was able to take the DNA and match it to DNA from the bone collected by the Hendricks County Sheriff's Office in 2013. Dan Chubb, Chief Deputy for the Hendricks County Coroner's Office, says this was a difficult case for the office.

Amanda Goings with the Hendricks County Sheriff's Office said the evolution of DNA technology means they are always looking back at older cases to see if they can't bring a resolution to them.

Remains identified, but questions remain

While it was a tragic outcome for family members of John Turner, Goings said the identification brings some answers to the family.

"Ultimately, this is a very tragic event in their lives, and obviously with 30 some years of history behind them, they've been suffering with this for a long time, not knowing, and not having answers," said Goings. "So to be able to give them at least a small piece of the information is quite rewarding."

The coroner's office says the investigation was a joint effort between them, the Hendricks County Sheriff's Office, and the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

"The person was reported missing in Indianapolis, so we're going to be coordinating with the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department," said Goings.

Boone County Jane Doe identified as 17-year-old girl

While the remains have been identified, Goings says the work is just beginning to try to figure out what happened to John Turner. Goings expects the two

departments will work together on this case to try to bring the family more answers.

“You can’t take one section of a puzzle and put it together without the other, so we have good working relationships with MPD and the coroner’s office, so we’ll be working as a team to get that taken care of,” said Goings.

Case brings light to other unsolved cases

While the identification came as a tragic moment for the Turner family, Goings says it serves as an example to other families that answers may eventually come to them, even if it is not desirable.

“It’s a tragic situation and we don’t wish that for anyone,” said Goings. “Stay vigilant and stay strong and to help us put the pieces together.”

One family that was hoping the remains would be linked to their case is the Dao family.

We reached out to the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department for comment on this investigation. We will provide an update once we receive a response.

Max Lewis contributed to this report