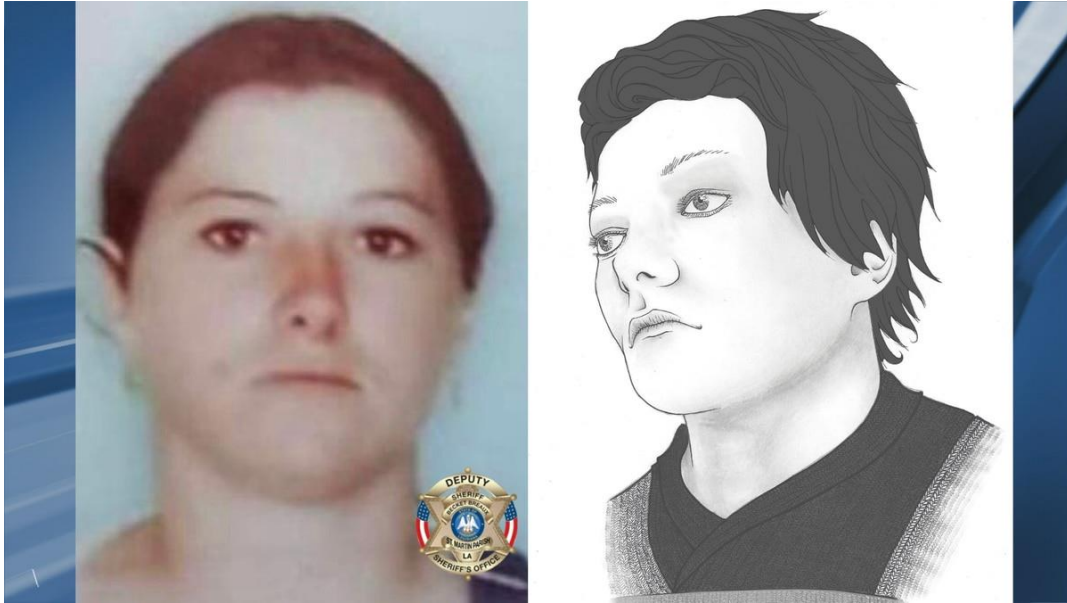


# Authorities identify La. pedestrian killed over 40 years ago



Michele Oakes-Gautreaux and a facial rendering of the accident victim.(St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Office, LSU)

By [Amanda Johnson](#)

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Breaux Bridge, La. (KPLC) - It's case closed for a 40-year investigation after forensic experts identified the victim of a 1981 pedestrian-vehicle crash.

The woman, now identified as Michele Elaine Oakes-Gautreaux, also known as Michele Elaine Oakes Boutilier, 26, of Cut Off, was killed in the early morning of December 5, 1981, on I-10 West in Breaux Bridge.

Investigators at the time did not find anything in the victim's belongings to identify her, said St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Office spokesperson Capt. Ginny Higgins. Investigators were also unable to find her next of kin.

The woman was buried in March 1982, Capt. Higgins said. St. Bernard Catholic Church in Breaux Bridge donated the burial plot, casket and tomb for the then-unidentified woman. Pellerin Funeral Home provided the services.

Two Breaux Bridge residents cared for the woman's grave site until their deaths, Capt. Higgins said. An unknown person then took over caring for her grave.

Investigators shared information with local and federal law enforcement in nearby states at the time of her death and in the following years, hoping to find a connection with a missing persons case, but no connections were found, Capt. Higgins said.

Researchers with the LSU Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services (FACES) Laboratory created a facial approximation of the victim and added information about the case to its database, Capt. Higgins said. Her body was exhumed in 2006 to develop an anthropological profile and collect DNA samples.

The St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Office continued searching for decades - they posted to Facebook in December 2017, looking for a family member or friend who could identify the victim. The post attracted international interest in the case, Capt. Higgins said.

The sheriff's office received a Facebook message that would ultimately lead to a match on January 10, 2022. DNA samples were collected and analyzed at the LSU FACES Laboratory, Louisiana State Police Crime Laboratory and the University of North Texas Health Science Center for Human Identification, Capt. Higgins said.

After extensive testing, researchers determined that the DNA was a match, and authorities confirmed the identity of the victim.