

Marion County officials ID remains of woman believed to be Shawn Grate victim from 2006

[Sarah Volpenhein](#), **Marion Star** Published 12:36 p.m. ET June 4, 2019 | Updated 8:35 a.m. ET June 5, 2019

Marion County officials have identified the woman whose skeleton was found in 2007 in a dump site off Victory Road. Sarah Volpenhein, The Marion Star

CONNECTTWEETLINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE

MARION — The woman believed to be convicted serial killer Shawn Grate's first victim now has a name.

Dana Nicole Lowrey, of Minden, Louisiana, has been identified as the woman whose skeletal remains were found in 2007 off Victory Road north of Marion, a case that had stumped Marion County detectives until recently when a team of genetic genealogists cracked open the case and solved her identity.

"I just can't emphasize how much I appreciate the work that was done by all of the people that worked on this case from the crime scene people; from the scientists; investigators; our federal, state and local partners all the way across the United States," Marion County Sheriff Tim Bailey said at a press conference Tuesday, surrounded by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost and by the deputies, a forensic artist and others who worked on the case.

Previously: [DNA testing might help identify Grate murder victim](#)

Previously: [Crowd in court applauds death sentence for Shawn Grate](#)

Investigators have spent thousands of hours on the case over the last 12 years, Marion County Chief Deputy Aaron Corwin estimated, tracking down leads that led them across North America and even to eastern Europe.

In efforts to identify the Marion County victim, multiple forensic sketches were made, a clay model was built of what the woman would have looked like and isotope testing was done on her bones that found she was likely from the southern United States.

The breakthrough in the case came last month after the Marion County Sheriff's Office teamed up with the California-based nonprofit DNA Doe Project, which uses genetic genealogy to help solve missing and unidentified persons cases.

Bailey met with Lowrey's family in Louisiana last month after receiving preliminary results that she was Jane Doe, he said. Lowrey had a significant other and two young daughters at the time she disappeared at age 23, he said.



Marion County Sheriff Tim Bailey called a press conference Tuesday to reveal the identity of a woman who has been without a name since her skeletal remains were found off Victory Road in 2007. Her name is Dana Nicole Lowrey, of Minden, Louisiana. (Photo: Sarah Volpenhein/Marion Star)

DNA from one of the two daughters confirmed that the skeletal remains were Lowrey's, he said.

Lowrey had been selling magazines door-to-door at the time she disappeared, Bailey said. Lowrey's significant other reportedly told Bailey she would call home almost every evening.

"The last time he heard from her was in May 2006," he said.

Bailey said Lowrey was never reported missing to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. He said that Lowrey's significant other had been unsure where to turn when he stopped hearing from Lowrey.

"We know she was in Arizona, Virginia, all over Ohio. Who was he [Lowrey's significant other] going to report her missing to?" Bailey said. "He didn't really feel there was any place for him to go."

Her remains were not found until March 10, 2007, when a man collecting scrap metal found a skull at a dump site off of Victory Road north of Marion, the Star has reported. Forensic anthropologists and investigators spent hours combing the site for pieces of bone, Bailey said.

"Not having any kind of identification on this victim, we had no idea where she was from. There was no starting point," he said. "For nine years, we had no idea how this woman had gotten here. We had no leads until Shawn Grate confessed."

Grate, who has been sentenced to death in the murders of two women in Ashland County, reportedly confessed to killing Lowrey after his arrest in September 2016, though he did not remember her name, saying that he thought she was called Diane or Dana, Bailey has said.

Last year, the sheriff's office contacted the DNA Doe Project, which uses the same methods used last year to crack open the cold case of the Golden State Killer in California.

The nonprofit uploads the DNA profiles of Jane and John Does to a free, open website called GEDmatch and compare them against other DNA profiles uploaded to the website, looking for possible relatives of the unidentified person.

GEDmatch is a website where people looking for long-lost relatives or researching their family tree often go to compare DNA results. If they have their DNA tested using a genetic testing service, such as AncestryDNA or 23andMe, they can go there to compare results across the services.

"We're fortunate that we uploaded Dana's DNA prior to a change in the terms of service with GEDmatch which now limits out matches to only users who have opted in," said Amanda Reno, a volunteer with the DNA Doe Project who worked on Lowrey's case. "If we had uploaded Dana's DNA even one week later, we would have experienced a tremendous setback in her identification."



A photo of Dana Nicole Lowrey, who is believed to have been the first victim of serial killer Shawn Grate when she was 23 years old. Investigators identified her as the woman whose skeletal remains were found off Victory Road in 2007. (Photo: Submitted)

Reno said that she and other team members were able to identify Lowrey as the possible Marion County victim "within a few hours."

Bailey said that investigators interviewed Grate on Friday and laid out a series of photographs to see if he could identify Lowrey.

"He could not, and he gave no additional information that would've helped us in the case," he said. "The picture (of Lowrey), just to be fair, was taken two years prior to her death, so he may not have remembered her as he saw her."

Marion County Prosecutor Ray Grogan said he is reviewing possible charges in Lowrey's killing.

Attorney General Yost said it is worth pursuing more charges.

"You might think, 'So what? This guy's already under the death penalty. He's already in prison.' It's important that the justice system brings closure. The family needs final answers," Yost said. "Frankly, as chief law officer of the state, I'd like this guy to have another conviction on his record just in case we have a problem on appeal in the future (in the Ashland County case)."

svolpenhei@gannett.com

740-375-5155

Tweet me @SarahVolp



Marion County officials have found the identity of the woman whose skeletal remains were found in 2007 off Victory Road in Marion County. Her name is Dana Nicole Lowrey. (Photo: Sarah Volpenhein/Marion Star)