

13 years ago, 'Jane Doe' was found in southern Fond du Lac County. DNA evidence helped identify her as Amy Yeary

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FOND DU LAC – Human remains found in Fond du Lac's town of Ashford in 2008 have been identified as Amy Marie Yeary from Rockford, Illinois, Sheriff Ryan Waldschmidt said in a press conference Tuesday.

Yeary's body was found by a group of hunters 13 years ago today, on Nov. 23, 2008, and was since known as "Jane Doe" until her identification this year based on DNA comparison with her mother and sister, and comparison of dental x-rays.

Born Dec. 9, 1989, Yeary would have been 18 years old when she died.

"On behalf of the Sheriff's Office, I want to express our heartfelt condolences to Amy's family and friends," Waldschmidt said.

"As much as we have been wondering who Amy was for all these years, you have been wondering where Amy is."

Also present at the press conference were Lieutenant of Detectives Chris Randall, Detective Ryan Murphy and Detective Nate LaMotte, who all worked on Yeary's case alongside now-retired detectives.

Investigators learned after her identification that Yeary was a victim of human sex trafficking, and had spent time in Chicago, Beloit and Milwaukee, Waldschmidt said.

Now, the sheriff's office is seeking the public's help in investigating the circumstances of Yeary's death.

"Any information you have could be extremely helpful to our investigation, and no matter how small or inconsequential you

think your information may be, we ask that you contact us," Waldschmidt said.

Anyone with information can contact Detective Ryan Murphy directly at 920-929-3380 to leave an anonymous tip with the Fond du Lac County Law Enforcement Tip Line, 920-906-4777.

Forensic advancements, national partnerships since 2008 led to Yeary's identification

In the initial investigation, the Sheriff's Office reviewed hundreds of missing persons files and sought public help with computer-generated photos of what she could have looked like, following up on the leads and tips that followed, Waldschmidt said.

When she remained unidentified, she was buried in Cattaraugus Cemetery on Dec. 7, 2011 but the department didn't give up on her case.

Technology evolved over the course of the next few years, and in 2016, two county detectives presented the case to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children panel in Virginia, consisting of national experts and a forensic anthropologist.

Under the panel's recommendation, the department exhumed her body in April of 2018 to collect bone, tooth and hair samples, sending them nationwide to various laboratories.

In addition to forensic testing, the department conducted genealogy research, assisted by national expert Barbara Rae-Venter.

Testing and research led to potential family members of the victim, and after collecting DNA samples, the department could positively identify Yeary.

Yeary's mother told detectives that Yeary called her in late summer of 2008 asking for a ride home from Beloit. Her mother lived in northern Illinois at the time, but couldn't give her a ride, and that was the last time the family heard from Yeary.

The family searched on their own and didn't make an official missing person report.

As the investigation continues, the department will follow advancements in DNA and forensic testing to learn more about what happened to Yeary in 2008.

"Identifying Amy Yeary is a big step in this complex and very active investigation; however, there is still much work that needs to be done to determine how and why she lost her life," Waldschmidt said.