

Sheriff



Larry Ashley, Okaloosa County Sheriff

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April 16, 2013

OCSO RECOGNIZES FDLE LAB TECHNICIANS FOR HELP SOLVING COLD CASE MURDERS



From left to right - Sheriff Larry Ashley and FDLE's: Jennifer Kay, Jennifer Hatler, Rachel Smith, Steve Desposito, Asst. Director Jim Madden and Jay Kelchak

Okaloosa County Sheriff Larry Ashley presented three lab technicians with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement with special recognition for their work in helping the agency solve three cold case homicides, dating back 16, 27, and 37 years respectively.

FDLE latent print analyst Rachel Smith helped link three latent prints on a piece of evidence in the February 1985 Okaloosa Island murder of Donald Lama Tidwell to suspect Mickey Lee Wilson. In addition, Crime Lab Analyst Jennifer Kay generated a DNA profile from a cigarette butt found at the Tidwell crime scene, producing a match with Wilson. On July 23rd, 2012, a 1st Judicial Circuit Grand Jury issued a murder indictment for Wilson

Kay's work with DNA also helped lead to the identity of a suspect in the 1975 murder of Catherine Ainsworth in Niceville. It was learned that the suspect, William Rouse, had died in 2006.

Crime Lab Analyst Jennifer Hatler helped obtain a male DNA profile from evidence in the 1997 murder of Pluma Bell Sanford in Fort Walton Beach. A DNA match was generated in November of last year, connecting the murder to Harry Bernard Leach of Missouri. Leach has since been arrested for Sanford's murder.

OCSO Investigators Brad Embry, Nesli Suhi-Moore, and Travis Robinson say the FDLE personnel were committed to helping them uncover the truth. They say their professionalism and tenacity helped find justice and closure for the friends and loved ones of the victims of violent crimes.

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WILLIAM "BILL" EDDINS
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OFFICE OF
STATE ATTORNEY
FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

January 24, 2013

PRESS RELEASE

William Eddins, State Attorney for the First Judicial Circuit, announced today that Harry B. Leach has been indicted by the Okaloosa County Grand Jury on the charge of First Degree Premeditated Murder and First Degree Felony Murder for the 1997 death of Pluma Bell Sanford.

Sanford was murdered in her home on Pineview Boulevard in Fort Walton Beach in August of 1997. The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Department had re-opened the investigation in 2010. In late 2012, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Crime Laboratory matched DNA found at the scene with Leach's DNA profile. Leach is awaiting extradition from Phelps County, Missouri.

Any questions may be directed to Assistant State Attorney William Bishop at (850) 651-7260.

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January 9, 2013



OCSO SOLVES 15-YEAR OLD MURDER OF ELDERLY VOLUNTEER

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office today charged a Missouri man with one count of capital murder and one count of kidnapping in connection with the 1997 homicide of 73-year old Pluma Bell Sanford.

It is the fourth cold case homicide solved by OCSO investigators since February 2011.

Investigator Brad Embry served the warrant, signed by Okaloosa Circuit Judge Jack Heflin, on 52-year old Harry Bernard Leach of Newburg Missouri today at the County Jail in Phelps County Missouri.

"I worked on this case as an investigator all those years ago", said Sheriff Larry Ashley. "It was heart-wrenching to see how this woman who had given so much was left in her home and was attacked, brutally attacked and assaulted."

Sanford's badly beaten body was discovered in the back bedroom of her Pineview Boulevard home in Fort Walton Beach on August 15, 1997.

The hospital and church volunteer had suffered blunt force trauma to her face and head, as well as broken ribs. The cause of death was ruled as asphyxia, secondary to ligature strangulation.

Investigator Brad Embry was assigned the cold case in 2010 and began reviewing the evidence. He re-submitted several items to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement lab to try to obtain



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a more complete DNA profile. The profile was then submitted into the Combined DNA Indexing System (CODIS).



When the DNA of a man arrested in Missouri on an aggravated assault charge was entered into the system in November 2012, it revealed a match to the DNA from the Sanford case. Investigators confirmed the sample and have been able to place Leach at the victim's home as a repairman around the time of the murder.

Investigator Embry noted the vital work of the FDLE, as well as the assistance of the Phelps County Missouri Sheriff's Office.

For remarks from Okaloosa County Sheriff Larry Ashley on this latest cold case arrest, go to the following link on the OCSO YouTube page:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DElfx8NzP0&feature=youtu.be>

The Sanford Case was also the subject of a Cold Case Chronicle by the OCSO PIO Office and can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jpp1fU9c3uc>

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August 3, 2012

OCSO SOLVES 37 YEAR OLD HOMICIDE



Catherine Ainsworth Investigator Travis Robinson with Hats that Provided DNA Match

A fresh look at a 37-year old Niceville murder case has led Investigator Travis Robinson to the now deceased killer and the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office is now able to close the case as solved. 37-year old Catherine Ainsworth had been sexually assaulted and strangled on August 30th, 1975 in her Hopper Street apartment in Niceville.

Investigator Travis Robinson starting delving into the Ainsworth Cold Case and in March 2010, submitted several items of evidence to the FDLE Crime Lab, including an orange rug the victim's body was found on. In April 2011, testing turned up DNA evidence from sperm found on the rug. The DNA profile was entered into a national law enforcement data base, but never received a hit.

In going over the old files however, Investigator Robinson came across the name of an individual who seemed to be of special interest to Okaloosa investigators back in 1975, 27-year old Staff Sgt. William P. Rouse, assigned to Eglin Air Force Base. Rouse, a neighbor of Ainsworth, had given conflicting stories to investigators who questioned him after the murder.

Robinson was eventually able to track Rouse's whereabouts to a location in Sloatsburg New York, north of New York City. He was able to contact some family members and learned that Rouse had died in 2006.

Family members then sent Robinson two of William Rouse's hats they'd kept after his death. Robinson submitted the hats to the FDLE Crime Lab for DNA analysis. A DNA profile, developed through this testing, revealed a match with the DNA found on the rug underneath the victim's body back in 1975. Comparison of these profiles determined that the possibility of anyone other than William Rouse being the contributor of the sperm at the crime scene were over two-quadrillion to one.

On July 27, 2012, Robinson was able to provide long awaited closure to the Ainsworth family.

"It's a good feeling to be able to close a 37-year old local murder," said Robinson, "not just for the investigator, but for the remaining family members of the victim."

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