

# Sheriff



**Larry Ashley, Okaloosa County Sheriff**

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## **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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