

# Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1982 Homicide Victim

A murdered woman whose body was found in a wooded area in Florida in 1982 has been identified as 37-year-old **Leona Jean Keller**.

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## Summary

In December 1982, the remains of an unidentified individual were discovered in Loxahatchee, Florida. Loxahatchee is a community in Palm Beach County, Florida located north of Miami. The discovery was made by a real estate agent who was assessing land along Okeechobee Boulevard and F Road. The remains were determined to belong to a middle-aged white female who was 24- 34 years old and stood between 5'3" to 5'6" tall. An investigation revealed that the woman suffered a gunshot wound to the head and her manner of death was ruled a homicide.

Alongside the woman's body were five pieces of jewelry—a silver handcrafted heart-shaped pinky ring, a gold mariner's anchor necklace with a 180-degree twist, a wristwatch, a four marquis cut ring, and a diamond ring with 14K white gold setting. Despite investigators' attempts, the murdered woman could not be identified and she became known as "Jeweled Mom".

Efforts to identify the woman included the development of a traditional DNA profile. The DNA profile was entered into CODIS, but there was no match to a known individual. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP16715. Over the years, investigators have worked diligently to identify the homicide victim, and in 2021 the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office teamed with Othram to determine if advanced DNA testing could help to identify the woman.



Forensic evidence was submitted to Othram's laboratory in The Woodlands, Texas where scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the evidence. Using Forensic Grade Genome Sequencing®, a comprehensive DNA profile was built for the unknown woman. Othram's forensic genetic genealogy team then used the profile in a genealogy search which resulted in new leads about the woman's identity. These leads were provided to investigators who launched a follow-up investigation.

The follow-up investigation led investigators to potential relatives of the woman. A reference DNA sample was collected from a possible relative and compared to the DNA profile of the homicide victim. This investigation led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be 37-year-old Leona Jean Keller.

Funding for the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy used in this case was provided by NamUs, a national program that assists the criminal justice community with the investigation and resolution of missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases across the United States and its territories. NamUs is funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and is managed through a contract with Research Triangle Institute International. We are grateful for the support of RTI, NamUs, and the NIJ.

The identification of Leona Jean Keller represents the 36th case in the State of Florida where officials have publicly identified an individual using technology developed by Othram. To read about other cases in Florida, [visit DNASolves](#).