

Mississippi State Medical Examiner & Mississippi Bureau of Investigation Team with Othram to Identify a Teen Missing Since 1997

An unknown young man, whose remains were discovered in Mississippi, is now identified as Stephen Shawn Austin, a teenager missing from El Paso, Texas since 1997.

In 2018, the remains of an unidentified individual were transferred to the Mississippi State Medical Examiner's Office so that an anthropological analysis could be developed in hopes that the individual could be identified. It was determined that the remains were that of an unknown Black male who was estimated to be approximately 15-24 years of age. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP132686.

In 2024, in an effort to resolve the mystery around the identity of these remains, the Mississippi State Medical Examiner's Office and Mississippi Bureau of Investigation teamed with Othram in hopes that advanced DNA testing could help to determine who this young man was.

This case is part of Othram's Project 525 initiative. Project 525, launched on May 23, 2024, in collaboration with RTI, which manages the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), aims to bring resolution to five hundred twenty-five juvenile cases published in NamUs. Funded largely through philanthropy and crowdfunding, this initiative aligns with National Missing Children's Day, by focusing on bringing answers to families of missing and unidentified children. We deeply appreciate everyone who has supported or plans to support the Project 525 Fund, making this important work possible.

In June of 2024, the Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner submitted evidence to Othram's laboratory in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists were able to develop a DNA extract from the evidence so that a DNA profile could be built for the young man using Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing®. Once the DNA profile was built, Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team performed genealogical and records research in order to develop new leads in the case. Funding for this case was provided by Mississippi native and philanthropist, Carla Davis.

These new leads were provided to investigators, and a follow-up investigation was conducted. With the provided information, investigators were able to identify a potential relative of the young man. The DNA profile of the potential relative was compared to unknown man's DNA profile using KinSNP® Rapid

Relationship Testing. This investigation led to the identification of the young man as Stephen "Steve" Shawn Austin, born September 22, 1979.

When he was 17 years old, Steve was reported missing from El Paso, Texas in August 1997, where he lived with his mother. While a missing person case was filed by his mother with the El Paso Police Department, Steve was never seen or heard from again. If alive today, Steve would have been 45 years old.

Stephen "Steve" Shawn Austin is the first individual identified as part of Project 525. Steve's identification also represents the 32nd case solved in the State of Mississippi using technology developed by Othram. To learn about other cases in Mississippi, visit DNASolves.

<https://dnasolves.com/articles/steven-shawn-austin-mississippi/>