

## WEATHERFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT NEWS RELEASE

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### **Weatherford Police Identify Woman Found in 1998, Bringing Closure to Family After 25 Years**

For 25 years, she was a mystery. A woman without a name, a story left unfinished. On October 7, 1998, her body was discovered in a wooded area behind the Petro Truck Stop in Weatherford, Texas. With no identification and only limited evidence to go on, investigators worked tirelessly to uncover her identity, but the answers remained just out of reach.

At the scene, Weatherford Police officers were joined by Tarrant County Medical Investigator Kelly Green and Forensic Anthropologist Dana Austin. A firearm was found next to the woman in a position suggesting suicide, and after a thorough autopsy and investigation, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed the cause of death. But while the case was closed, one question remained: **Who was she?**

Despite DNA being entered into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) and countless leads being pursued, no match was ever found. Over the years, the case was revisited, but each effort led to another dead end—until September 2023.

That month, retired Deputy Chief Greg Lance asked Lieutenant Johnny Qualls to have the Cold Case team take one more look. Could modern technology finally provide the answers that had eluded investigators for decades?

After collaborating with Dr. Crowder at the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office, the team explored forensic genealogy, a method that had helped identify long-lost victims in other cases. They turned to Othram Labs in The Woodlands, Texas, a company specializing in forensic genetic genealogy.

A small but crucial breakthrough came when investigators found that some of the woman's teeth remained intact. These were sent to Othram Labs for DNA extraction, and in December 2023, the lab was able to develop a profile. It was a moment of hope. Through careful research, ancestry links began to emerge, guiding investigators toward a family—and a long-awaited answer.

Then, on Christmas weekend 2023, Lieutenant Qualls made a life-changing phone call. On the other end of the line was **David Gillespie**, a man who had spent more than 25 years wondering what had happened to his mother, **Nellie**.

David had reported her missing all those years ago, but until now, he had never received the answers he desperately sought. As he described her—a woman who wore glasses and a wig—Lieutenant Qualls felt certain: **Nellie was the woman they had been searching for all these years.**

Though the circumstances of Nellie's passing were tragic, this breakthrough meant her family could finally bring her home. The original responding Medical Investigator, Judge Kelly Green, helped locate Nellie's burial site, ensuring her remains could be reunited with her loved ones at last.