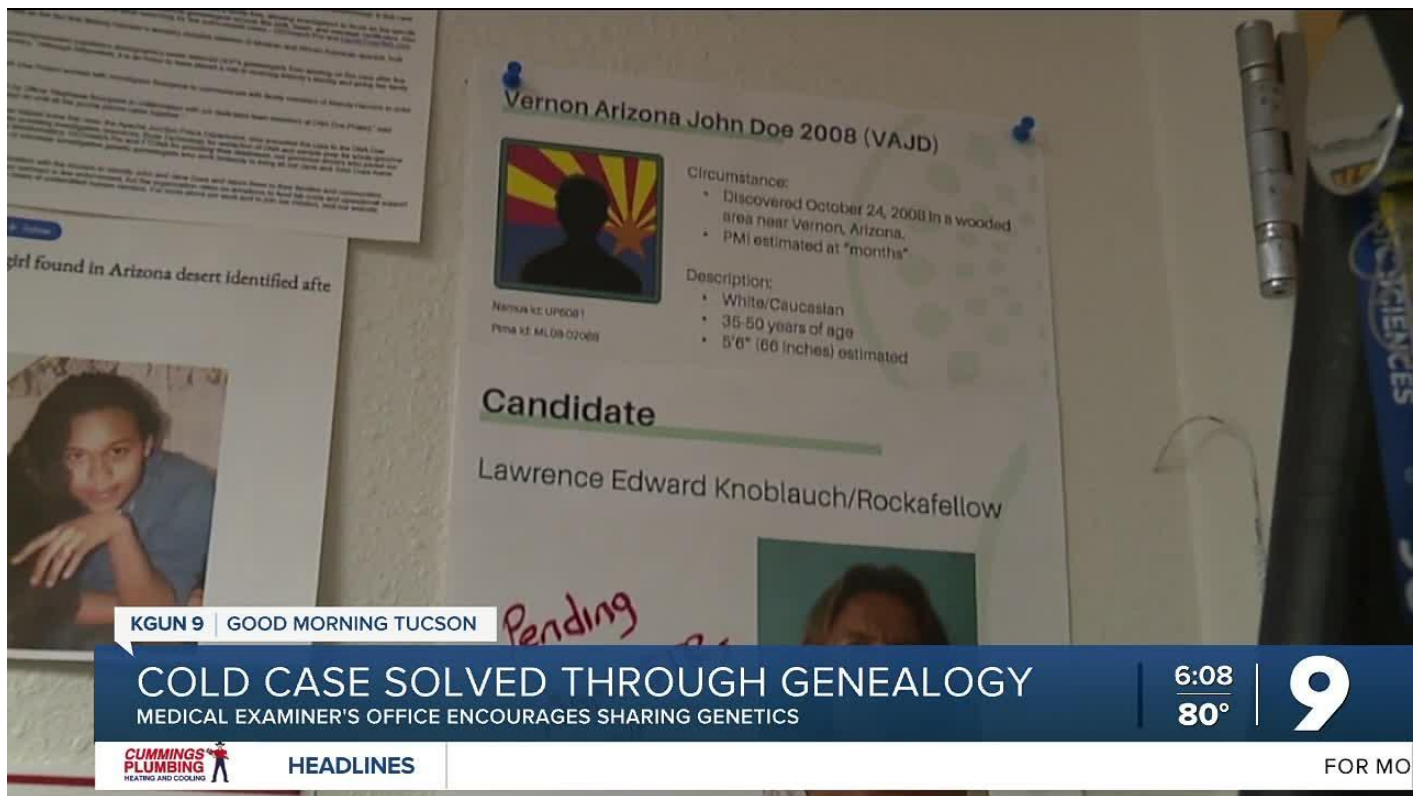


Pima County Medical Examiner's Office solves 2008 cold case thanks to public genealogy

They're encouraging people to share results from tests through genealogy companies like 23andMe, in the hopes of someday helping to solve more cases.

15 year old Cold Case solved via DNA





By: [Claire Graham](#)

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TUCSON, Ariz. — A 15-year-old cold case is finally getting some answers. The Pima County Medical Examiner's Office says they have been able to identify a man who died all alone, out in the desert.

"Our John Doe is **Lawrence Edward Knoblauch/Rockafellow**," forensic pathologist Dr. Bruce Anderson explained. Being able to confirm this man's identity, has been a long time coming for him. In 2008, Anderson examined the man's bones, found out in Vernon, Arizona.

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"So I did that at the request of the forensic pathologist and found one of his lower ribs with a very suspicious fracture," he said.

Vernon isn't in Pima County, but it's one of the many smaller areas the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner helps with, because they have the resources.

While we still don't know what happened to Lawrence Knoblauch/Rockafellow, just confirming his name has been a process.

With their hundreds of cold cases, the medical examiner's office works with several forensic investigative genetic genealogy groups, also known as IGG groups. One of them is DNA Hawkshaw, who in this case, arranged for Pima County to send Knoblauch/Rockafellow's bone sample to a lab. That lab was able to create a DNA profile, which DNA Hawkshaw put into public databases, used by companies similar to 23andMe, and Ancestry.com.

That's how they got a hit on a distant cousin, and through some old-fashioned genealogy work, they found a woman in western Arizona who they thought could be their John Doe's sister. They contacted her, and got her to take a traditional DNA test, the type used by the FBI, which would be able to confirm their connection with more certainty than the SNP ("snip") DNA profile used by the databases.

"Once that report was received, it showed that the woman up in the Kingman area had to be his sister," Anderson explained. That's how they confirmed exactly who Lawrence Knoblauch/Rockafellow was.

Dr. Anderson says that initial jump from a DNA sample to a possible name, is something we could all help to boost, to hopefully solve more cold cases. By taking those ancestry tests, and making your results public, your DNA could lead to answers.

Locally it's already worked, a dozen times.

"Almost always, the person who provided this SNP DNA profile never met the missing person, therefore never knew they were missing or dead," Anderson said. "And so people trying to solve their own little close family riddles and flesh out their own pedigrees, can really do a service."

He says this could go a lot further though, if more people, and especially people of color, would be more willing to share their genealogy results.

"Only about 10% hit that share button," Anderson said, "and apparently proportionately more white Americans do that than non-white Americans, which is why right now it's easier to use investigative genetic genealogy on white Americans."

That's part of why they were able to give Lawrence Knoblauch/Rockafellow his name back, as the first step in figuring out what happened to him. Anderson says it's possible from here, that police will talk to his sister and look into where Knoblauch/Rockafellow had been, to potentially develop leads about the circumstances of his death.

When it comes down to it, he says a lot of that potential starts with someone sharing results, to be able to bring hope and closure to so many families.

"We have over 1,500 cases," Anderson said, "any of which could be the next Lawrence Edward Knoblauch/Rockefeller."

The team at DNA Hawkshaw says if you're interested in sharing your results from an ancestry website, there are a few steps you can take. If you take a test through 23andMe, Ancestry.com, MyHeritage,

LivingDNA or other similar companies, you'll have the ability to download your raw genealogy data. From there, you can upload it to one of the three services the IGG groups can access, called GEDmatch, DNA Justice, or FTDNA. FTDNA is the only one of the three that also also features a direct-to-consumer test you can take, and then opt-in for IGG to share your results.