

Collier County Sheriff's Office & FBI Team with Othram to Identify a 1978 Homicide Victim

After 46 years, a woman whose remains were discovered in a shallow grave in Collier County, Florida, has been identified as **Joan Shirley Joyce Waters**, born in 1936.

Solved



Summary

In June 1978, the remains of an unidentified individual were discovered in a shallow grave half a mile south of Alligator Alley, located in Collier County, Florida. Alligator Alley is a stretch of I-75 that spans 80 miles cutting through the Everglades between Naples and Fort Lauderdale. The Collier County Sheriff's Office arrived at the scene and determined the remains were that of a white female, approximately 5'4" tall and weighing 180 pounds. The woman was estimated to be between 45 and 65 years old and had extensive dental work on both her upper and lower teeth. Evidence suggested that she may have suffered from chronic ear infections, potentially leading to some hearing loss. No clothing or personal items were found with the woman.

In June 2007, details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP374. Despite extensive efforts by law enforcement investigators to identify the woman, no matches were found, and the case went cold due to a lack of viable leads.

In 2022, the Collier County Sheriff's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the forensic evidence and used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the unknown woman. After successfully completing the process, the DNA profile was delivered to the FBI's forensic genetic genealogy team, who performed the necessary work to generate new investigative leads in the case.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. This investigation led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be Joan Shirley Joyce Waters, born in 1936.

Funding for the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy used in this case was provided by NamUs, a national clearinghouse 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 Joan Shirley Joyce Waters represents the 29th case in the State of Florida where officials have publicly identified an individual using technology developed by Othram. Most recently in Orlando, Florida, [Gregory Patrick Carpenter](#), who was reported missing in 1993, was identified after 31 years.