

After nearly 23 years, investigators ID missing woman found in metro-east creek bed

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The Columbia Police Department released this photo Friday after investigators were able to identify Carol Hemphill as the deceased person found in a creek bed nearly 23 years ago. She is holding her daughter Catricia. *Columbia Police Department*

With the help of new DNA technology, investigators have been [able to identify](#) the remains of a St. Louis woman found in a creek bed in Columbia in 2002.

Carol Hemphill, who was reported missing in St. Louis on July 27, 2001, was identified as the deceased person found nearly 23 years ago on March 28, 2002, by an Illinois Department of Transportation crew along Illinois 3 near Gall Road, Columbia Police Chief Jason Donjon said in a news release Friday.

The cause of death has not been released but this case is being investigated as a homicide.

Donjon said in an interview that Hemphill's family members were "very emotional but appreciative" when they informed of the positive identification.

"We're not all the way done yet," he said. "We're going to still constantly work to" solve this homicide.

Detective Sgt. Michael Barnett and Detective Luke Moravec of the Columbia Police Department “began taking a new look at the investigation in recent years, as advancements in DNA technology provide new opportunities for further analysis,” according to the news release.

A portion of the skeletal remains were sent to a lab at the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification after the case was selected for a 2022 grant providing funding for “forensic genetic genealogy testing,” Donjon stated.

“In late October 2024, the detectives received a crucial lab report which revealed a connection between the human remains and a male DNA sample belonging to Dale Howard.. Further analysis confirmed that Dale Howard’s biological mother was identified as Carol Hemphill.”

Donjon said Howard is deceased.

DNA samples of Hemphill’s family members were collected and submitted to the University of North Texas for comparison, Donjon said. The final laboratory results confirmed Hemphill’s identity on Feb. 24.

After the human remains were found in 2002, the Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis was activated to investigate the “Jane Doe” case.

At the time, investigators believed the human remains had been in the creek bed for about six to 12 months before being discovered.

Hemphill was 39 at the time she was reported missing. She was last seen leaving her home when she told her husband she was going for a drive, Donjon said.



The Columbia Police Department released this sketch Friday after investigators were able to identify a woman found deceased nearly 23 years ago. *Columbia Police Department*