

Channel 13 Investigation Helps Close Cold Case

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DES MOINES, Iowa — For nine years Des Moines police have been investigating a cold case involving a homeless man whose body was found in the river. Now that man's family has some closure.

“We were able to present the cremains of what we've been calling John Doe 2005 for the past nine years to the family today....it's good,” says Polk County Chief Medical Examiner Gregory Schmunk.

Schmunk fights back tears as he talks about finally giving a family closure. Back in October of 2005, the body of a man was found in the Des Moines River near the Center Street Dam. It was close to a homeless camp. The man had about \$10 in cash on him, but no identification.

Over the years, investigators with the county medical examiners office struggled to identify him, showing doctors, police and the homeless a picture of the man's face taken during the autopsy.

“We checked all the homeless encampments, we checked all of the shelters and everything else. Nobody could recognize this guy.” Dr. Schmunk says, “He had multiple admissions here at Broadlawns Medical Center. Nobody recognized the photographs that we showed them.”

Then, in 2010, we ran a story about the case as part of an ongoing series we were doing on cold cases. A woman thought she recognized the picture of the victim we showed as her ex-husband and called Des Moines police, but she tells us police incorrectly told her the body was that of a Hispanic male.

Last week, the woman checked out our story again on the iowacoldcases.org website, and was sure the body belonged to her ex-husband, Robert Bryan McMahon. She contacted the medical examiners office.

“Just ecstatic about how we got this done,” Dr. Schmunk says, “A little bit frustrated by the fact that we really tried...we did everything really right but the pieces just didn't fit together.”

Family members tell us McMahon, who went by his middle name Bryan, studied to be a chef in France and Atlanta, and owned a restaurant in Boone for several years. They say he was a good man, but his alcoholism robbed him of his business, his family, and eventually his life. They say he can now have peace, according to the county medical examiner, because of the story we aired.

“It was absolutely crucial,” Dr. Schmunck says, “Had you not done your work, and Iowa Cold Cases not put it out there, he would have been never identified.”

Police say McMahon’s death is not considered suspicious.

To learn more about unsolved cases around the state, log on to iowacoldcases.org.