

Help still sought in 4-year-old crime

September 21, 2010 - By JOSHUA S. FLESHER Tribune Chronicle



BAZETTA - Hoping to generate leads into a 4-year-old mystery, the Bazetta Township Police Department and the Trumbull County Coroner's Office unveiled a detailed reconstruction of the face they believe belongs to skeletal remains found in the township.

Presenting the bust on Monday morning, Dr. Humphrey Germaniuk, Trumbull County coroner and Detective Joe Sofchek discussed their hopes that by giving the skeletal remains a face, the mystery behind their discovery might be put to rest.

"The most important person in this room is not Detective Sofchek, it's not me. That is the most important, he is the most important person in this room," Germaniuk said Monday. "That is why we are all here ... to try to find out who he is and to try to find out what happened so that justice and truth can be found."

The reconstruction was prepared by the FBI's Special Projects Unit Forensic Artists.

According to Germaniuk, the reproduction cost the county and the Bazetta Police Department nothing.

The remains were found four years ago in a swampy area of Mosquito Lake State Park.

"On July 23, 2006, a father and son were crossing some of the swampy areas of Mosquito Lake and came across what were believed to be skeletal remains," said Germaniuk.

After the body was discovered, Germaniuk's office was called in.

"In the evening it was confirmed that they were human skeletal remains," said Dr. Germaniuk.

The skeleton was found without clothing and without skin tissue completely intact except for some of its small bones.

On the left side of the head, a gold earring was found but no other identifiable items were located.

Preliminary examination was done on the remains, but no determination could be made of who the bones belonged to and why they were there.

Hoping to jumpstart the investigation, the remains were turned over.

"Further examination at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, D.C., where further examination revealed the remains to be those of an African-American male, being approximately 50 years of age and having a height of five feet eight inches, plus or minus three inches," Germaniuk said.

The weight of the man is unknown.

"They are just going by the bone structure," Sofchek said. "There is no way to know weight based on bones."

According to Sofchek, the weight of the man as well as small features such as hair length are not as important as the face.

"(The FBI) doesn't want to put a lot of hair on it. They want people to concentrate on the face," he said.

DNA from the body was also sent to two agencies, VICAP, the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, and the North Texas Science Institute, both of which turned up nothing, said Sofchek.

The question remains as to why the body was in the marshy area and what caused the man's death.

"When you find human remains that appear to have been dumped in that particular area for several months, you would suspect foul play," said Germaniuk.

There, however, is no sign of foul play or any indication that the death was a homicide.

"This case is being treated as a suspicious death and until we can find out who he is and until we have more information it is being treated as a suspicious death," Germaniuk said.

In the four years since the bones were found, there have been no leads and calls regarding the remains have completely dried up.

"When we initially determined there was a skeleton found, we had approximately eight to 10 leads and most of them were all females," said Sofchek. "Once it was determined it was a male, it just shut off...no phone calls and nothing is new from four years ago."

Germaniuk believes that lack of calls could point to the man having come from outside the Mahoning Valley.

"The very fact that no one's come forth leads us to believe that he may be from outside of the area," Germaniuk said. "If not even outside of the country such as Canada or one of the larger cities were you may have transients."

The coroner's office and the police department are both hoping that giving the skeleton a human face will lead them to the answers that they have been searching for for four years.

"He is someone," said Germaniuk. "He belongs to someone. He once was someone."