

# Cold Case Task Force Annual Report 2020

To the Colorado House and Senate Judiciary Committees

(Section 24-33.5-109(8), C.R.S)

October 1, 2020

## Current Membership

There are sixteen members of the Cold Case Task Force. The Senate President and the Speaker of the House each appoint two family representatives, as well as one chief of police and one sheriff. The Executive Director of the Colorado District's Attorney's Council (CDAC) appoints three district attorney's (representing rural, suburban, and urban offices). The Governor appoints two representatives of statewide victim advocacy organizations and a forensic pathologist. The appointees to these positions are limited to serving two consecutive terms. Two positions are filled by statutory designation (Executive Director of the Department of the Public Safety, or his/her designee; and the Attorney General or his/her designee).

Current members:

**Laura Saxton**, (Family Representative); appointed by Senate President (first term 2015-2018, second term 2019-2021)

**Sean Gruno**, (Family Representative); appointed by the Senate President (first term 2019-2021)

**Chief Douglas Stephens**, (Littleton Police Department); appointed by Senate President (first term 2015-2018, second term 2019-2021)

**Sheriff Steven Reams**, (Weld County Sheriff); appointed by Senate President (first full term 2019-2021)

**Stephany Booth**, (Family Representative); Appointment by Speaker of the House (first term 2019 – 2021)

**Rhonda Fields**, (Family Representative); Appointment by Speaker of the House (first term 2015 – 2018, second term 2019-2021)

**Sheriff Amy Reyes**, (Lake County Sheriff); Appointment by Speaker of the House (first term 2015-2018)

**Chief Dan McCasky**, (Lakewood Police Department), appointed by Speaker of the House (first term 2019-2021)

**Dr. Emily Russell**, (Forensic Pathologist); appointed by Governor (first full term 2019-2021)

**John Kellner**, Assistant District Attorney, 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District – (*Representing Urban District Attorneys, appointed by Exec. Dir. CDAC*) serving an unexpired first term 2016-2019, first full term 2019-2021)

**Matt Durkin**, Assistant District Attorney, 1<sup>st</sup> Judicial District – (*Representing Suburban District Attorneys – appointed by Exec. Dir. CDAC*) (first full term 2019 – 2021)

**Jim Bullock**, District Attorney, 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial District (*Representing Rural District Attorneys, appointed by Exec. Dir. CDAC*) (first term 2016-2019, second term 2019-2021)

**Sarah Chaikin**, (*Statewide Victim Organization*); appointed by the Governor (first full term 2019-2021)

**Rob Wells**, (*Statewide Victim Organization*) – (first full term 2016-2019; second term 2019 – 2021)

**Janet Drake**, Deputy Attorney General (*Statutory position*)

**John Camper**, Director CBI (*Statutory position*)

## Quarterly Meeting Schedule

NOVEMBER 1, 2019

FEBRUARY 4, 2020

MAY 1, 2020

(Virtual meeting held due to COVID 19)

AUGUST 7, 2020

(Meeting cancelled due to COVID 19 - electronic update provided to Task Force members)

TO THE LIVING WE OWE RESPECT,  
BUT TO THE DEAD WE OWE ONLY  
THE TRUTH.

~ VOLTAIRE

## 2019 – 2020 COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS

### COLORADO MISSING PERSON DAY FEBRUARY 4, 2020

The Colorado Missing Person Day annual event was held at the State Capitol. Family members gathered in a designated senate room before entering the chambers for the reading of the Colorado Missing Person Day Resolution. Family members were greeted by members of the Senate as they entered the chambers. Due to inclement weather this year family members returned to the Senate meeting room for the reading of the names of those family members still missing in Colorado. Each attendee was given a yellow daisy to remember their loved one.



### MISSING IN COLORADO EVENT AUGUST 22, 2020

This annual event was held virtually this year due to the impacts of COVID 19 in our state. Although, we were unable to gather in person this year members of the planning committee took the time to outline the various resources for victims' families and post those links to the CBI website explaining where to obtain more information. Additionally, anyone wishing to speak with a victim advocate regarding their missing loved one could submit a form requesting to be contacted. In place of the family luncheon this year, a ZOOM meeting was held on August 22, 2020. It was important to create that same family luncheon environment so family members could share their stories and offer support to one another in a safe environment even though we did not meet in person this year. Paul and Ramona Blee whose daughter has been missing since 1979 facilitated the meeting.

Remembering those Missing in Colorado		Remembering those Missing in Colorado		Remembering those Missing in Colorado	
<p><b>Benjamin Franklin Gray</b> June 1, 1978</p> <p>30-year-old Benjamin Gray was last seen in Mountain View, Colorado on May 20, 1978. He was the big dog of the Gray family and was the only child of a family of seven.</p> <p>Mr. Gray left the neighborhood with a friend late in the evening of May 20, 1978. They were going to Mr. Gray's family friend's home in Mountain View, Colorado. In the morning, Mr. Gray's family learned he had not returned home.</p> <p>Mr. Gray's family learned he had been seen in the "Darien" area during the week preceding his disappearance. Mr. Gray was last seen near the intersection of 10th and 11th streets in the "Darien" area. Mr. Gray was last seen wearing a green and white plaid shirt and dark blue jeans. He was wearing a watch and a pair of white sneakers with a blue stripe.</p> <p>Anyone with information regarding this case is asked to please contact the Thornton Police Department.</p>	 	<p><b>Martin "Herbie" Hobson</b> September 7, 2015</p> <p>Mr. Martin Hobson, 59 years old, was last seen in the afternoon of Monday, September 7, 2015 near the area where Mr. Hobson lived at the 4100 block of Newton Drive. Since 2015, family and friends have not had any contact with Mr. Hobson. Mr. Hobson has a medical condition which requires regular medication.</p> <p>Mr. Hobson is described as a 59-year-old black male, 6'0"175 lbs Brown Hair Brown Eyes.</p> <p>Anyone with information regarding this case is asked to please contact the Colorado Springs Police Department.</p>	 	<p><b>Victoria Sanchez and Yvonne Mestas</b> November 1, 1982</p> <p>On November 1, 1982, 15-year-old Yvonne Mestas was last seen at her high school in the company of a juvenile female named Victoria Sanchez. Neither has been seen since.</p> <p>Anyone with information is asked to please contact the Rocky Ford Police Department or the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.</p>	 

### NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

On the evening of September 25, 2020, a virtual event was held to celebrate the National Day of Remembrance dedicated to those victims lost to homicide and support their surviving family members.

Remembering those we have lost		Remembering those we have lost		Remembering those we have lost	
<p><b>Tracy Neef</b> March 16, 1984</p>  <p>The victim was abducted after being dropped off at school in the morning, her body was found later that day.</p> <p>Anyone with information regarding this case, is asked to please contact the Thornton Police Department.</p>		<p><b>Doris and Allen Sorenson</b> October 31, 1984</p>  <p>On October 31, 1984, Doris and Allen were killed in their home. Their jewelry store had been burglarized a year prior to the day.</p> <p>Anyone with information regarding this case, is asked to please contact the Windsor Police Department.</p>		<p><b>Jessica Rose Bejarano</b> April 6, 2007</p>  <p>On April 6, 2007, the mother of 2 Jessica Bejarano was found in her residence deceased. Investigation is still underway.</p> <p>Anyone with information regarding this case, is asked to please contact the Frederick Police Department or the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.</p>	

## CBI DATABASE AND GENERAL UPDATES

The CBI continues to update the Cold Case Database. Each year, more cases become cold in our state. The CBI continues to consult with local law enforcement and a variety of open source and criminal justice databases to ensure all unresolved cases are included. To date the CBI database currently lists 1,763 cases (1,352 homicides; 319 Missing Persons, 89 Unidentified Remains, and 3 “Other” [pending determination by the law enforcement agency as to whether the case is a missing or a homicide victim]). Because of the possibility that individuals listed as “missing persons” or “unidentified remains” may be victims of homicide, the Cold Case Task Force supported the addition of these categories to the CBI database. While Families of Homicide Victims and Missing Persons (FOHVAMP) also maintains a database, there will always be a disparity between the two as CBI does not include out of state cases or ones that have been determined to be suicide by the coroner.

The CBI continues to receive requests from local agencies. In some cases this is a direct result of a CODIS hit being received by the investigating agency. In other cases agencies are embracing new technologies and exploring the possibilities of the use of forensic genetic genealogy. This is a new and exciting technology providing hope to both surviving family members and law enforcement agencies. However, this new technology comes with a cost. \$3500 – \$7000 is what it will cost agencies for outside testing of just one item of evidence. Many local agencies do not have funds available. The CBI has applied for grants through the Department of Justice over the last two years to offset the cost of this testing. Unfortunately, neither applications were selected for funding. Local agencies must now look to their own budgets to cover the cost for the additional testing. For larger agencies within our state locating funds is easier. However, many smaller more rural agencies simply don’t have the funds. Therefore, these cases may sit idle leaving families with few answers and growing frustration regarding their loved ones case.

The CBI continues to utilize interns in our office to assist in the updating of cases in the cold case database and the entry of cases into the FBI Violent Criminal and Apprehension Program (ViCAP). ViCAP is a nationwide database that allows law enforcement across the country to enter homicide both complete and attempts into the system with a great deal of details in hopes that similar crimes can be connected through forensic evidence and unique M.O. Due to the number of unsolved cases in Colorado it will take years to get all of these cases entered. Interns continue to assist our office by also entering Colorado long-term missing person cases into the National Missing and Unidentified Person System (NamUs). In the end, we hope that the more visible these cases are the better chance we have for case resolution.

This year, the CBI conducted a thorough overview of its cold case training curriculum. This was something discussed previously but it was evident after 10 years that changes to the instruction were needed. We did a complete overhaul. We created a new section dedicated to missing persons and unidentified remains cases. We separated out the review and testing through our forensic services section. We created an opportunity for class attendees to share and present cases they are working on. Unfortunately, the class was cancelled this year due to the impact of COVID 19 in our state. We hope we will be able to offer this course again in the near future as there is real benefit to being in the classroom with other students and having the ability to network face to face.

In July 2020, the Colorado Department of Public Safety (CDPS) created a new initiative to increase the number of cold case homicides reviewed and/or investigated by proactively contacting agencies and inquiring about the case status and the available items of evidence. It is our hope that through this process we will build on our partnerships with local law enforcement working together to identify unresolved cases that may benefit from the ever-changing technology in the form of DNA, fingerprints, and forensic genealogy. This will be a challenging task based on the limited resources and personnel available within our existing budget to carry out this initiative.

COVID 19 has had a dramatic human and financial impact on our state. Resources are scarce. The CBI continues to be innovative in its attempts to create additional resources for cold case investigation. There are more than 1700 cold cases in the state of Colorado and more cases are added each year. These cases will continue to go unsolved until we can realize the intent of the 2007 legislation and create a true Cold Case Team of investigators within the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

## Cold Case Playing Cards

The Cold Case Playing Card Program has been active in Colorado since October 2014. Since 2014 the CBI has distributed nearly 30,000 decks of Playing Cards to our Colorado Department of Corrections facilities as well as to our local detention facilities across the state. The CBI continues to receive tips through the tip line. We had created and developed Deck 5 and were hoping to distribute the new decks this fall. However, due to the impacts of COVID 19 in our state the funding was and is not currently available. We are hopeful we will be able to produce this deck next year.



## Requests for CBI Assistance

The statute (section 24-33.5-425(3) (a) and (b), (CRS), provides that local law enforcement agencies on their own initiative or at the request of a family members can request CBI investigative assistance with cold homicide cases. In the past year, the CBI has received 52 requests for assistance with the investigation, analysis, case organization and forensic evidence review of cold cases.

## Successes

The Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) continues to provide investigative leads. However, the new emerging technology of forensic genealogy is changing the way we investigate cold cases. Through determination and tenacity by local investigators and forensic scientists these cases are being solved. Below are examples of some cases solved this year with assistance from both Investigations and Forensic Services at the CBI. May we never forget these victims.

- HELENE PRUSZYNSKI
- BETTY LEE JONES
- BABY FAITH
- RAINBOW FALL JANE DOE – BECKY REDEKER

