Human remains found nearly 30 years ago identified as missing Wisconsin man

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Human remains in 30-year-old Sanford cold case identified

Human remains discovered in a wooded area in Sanford nearly 30 years ago have been identified as John Richard Moulis, a Wisconsin native who was reported missing in Orange County in January 1997, police said.

The Brief

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  - Human remains found in Sanford nearly 30 years ago have been identified as John Richard Moulis, who disappeared in 1997.
  - Investigators used advanced technology and genetic genealogy to identify Moulis, whose sister died two days after the identification.

- Sanford police are seeking information from anyone who knew Moulis to help determine what happened to him.

SANFORD, Fla. - Human remains discovered in a wooded area in Sanford nearly 30 years ago have been identified as John Richard Moulis, a Wisconsin native who was reported missing in Orange County in January 1997, police said.

Investigators used advanced technology and genetic genealogy to identify Moulis, who disappeared at the age of 37.

The new developments brought answers to a family that had spent decades wondering what happened to him. However, authorities are still working to determine the circumstances surrounding his disappearance and death.

Remains discovered by people walking a dog

The backstory:

Moulis was reported missing on Jan. 21, 1997. Months later, two people walking their dog discovered human remains in a wooded area in Sanford.

"It was just two passersby walking their dog and located the bones, and they saw the skull and called it in," said Bianca Gillett, a public information officer with the Sanford Police Department.

At the time, investigators had not connected the remains to Moulis' disappearance. The case remained unresolved for decades before authorities revisited the evidence and pursued new investigative leads.

Genetic genealogy helps identify Moulis

Investigators eventually used advanced technology and genetic genealogy to trace potential relatives and establish Moulis' identity.

John Richard Moulis

Moulis was born in Wisconsin and moved to the Orlando area around 1986. He worked in janitorial services at Splendid China and may also have worked for a construction contractor connected to Walt Disney World, Gillett said.

Police described Moulis as a son, brother and uncle who was part of a large family.

"John was part of a large family that loved him," Gillett said.

Identification came shortly before sister's death

Moulis' sister, his closest living relative, had spent much of her life wondering what happened to her brother. She died two days after investigators confirmed his identity, Gillett said.

Gillett said the timing was meaningful to investigators because they were able to provide the family with answers before the sister died.

Although the identification has resolved a longstanding question about who the remains belonged to, investigators are still seeking information about what happened to Moulis.

Police seek information from the public

What you can do:

Sanford police are asking anyone who knew Moulis, worked with him or lived in the same apartment complex to come forward with information that could help investigators reconstruct his final days.

Anyone with information about Moulis or the circumstances surrounding his disappearance is asked to contact the Sanford Police Department.

The Source: This story was written based on information shared by the Sanford Police Department.