

Mystery bodies awaiting identification

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Does anyone know them? Miss them?

The man whose left hand sported a gold ring with a marijuana leaf emblem when his charred body was found in an east side Detroit alley? Or the woman wearing a jacket decorated with a peace symbol and a hand-painted Brooklyn Bridge, a homicide victim discovered in the Cass Corridor? Or the homeless person, who died under an I-75 overpass, a live cat contentedly nestled against his mummified body?

In refrigerated repose, they now lie at the Wayne County Morgue, unidentified and unclaimed.

Every year, about 400 unidentified bodies come into the morgue. Most get a name and a loved one to claim them. But every year, there are eight to 10 who go without a name for weeks, months and sometimes forever.

The Wayne County morgue is investigating six such cases, including a human skeleton unearthed in a Taylor vegetable garden last spring.

In Oakland County, the Medical Examiner's Office is trying to determine the identity of a woman whose remains were discovered in September by children in a forest near exclusive Lake Angelus.

At the time, investigators could not tell how long the body had rested in the woods. Last week, anthropologists from Michigan State University were called in to evaluate the skeletal remains.

Eventually, when the scientific and medical reports are completed and the police investigation is

Medical investigators work on 6 morgue cases

exhausted, the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office makes arrangements to have the remains buried. The remains may be kept for months, even years, depending on each case and the investigation's status.

"We do want to give these people a final resting place," said Tom Alston, the chief investigator for the medical examiner.

The Wayne County Morgue gives the bodies a case number and a moniker, based on some characteristic of the case.

Anyone with information about these cases can call the Wayne County Medical Examiner's office anytime at 313-833-2570.

■ **Case No. 99-2377, known as Cat:** The body of a 30- to 40-year-old white male was discovered March 8 under an overpass at I-75 and 12th Street. A cat was curled up next to the remains. The man's body was mummified, indicating long exposure to the elements, and he was surrounded by trash in a makeshift shelter. He was about 5-foot-9, weighed 142 pounds and had a brown mustache and beard and light brown hair with a reddish tint. He wore a dark green T-shirt and died of natural causes.

■ **Case No. 99-3882, known as NYC April:** She was a homicide victim found gravely wounded on the corner of Cass and M.L. King Boulevard in Detroit on April 18. She died two



Found in April near Cass

days later at Detroit Receiving Hospital. She was white, with hazel/green eyes and brown hair. The woman appeared to be between 30 and 40 years old, 5-foot-6 and weighed between 120 and 142 pounds. She wore a pair of blue jeans with a broken pearl necklace in the pocket. Her tan reversible blue plaid jacket was decorated with a Big Apple emblem inscribed with "NYC #1," a depiction of the Brooklyn Bridge and a peace sign.

■ **Case No. 99-4429, known as Taylor Skeleton:** On May 7, a Taylor man was digging in his vegetable garden behind his garage. The man, who has lived at the house since 1990, found human bones. Investigators unearthed a complete male skeleton. Pathologists determined the body had been buried at least 20 to 30 years. The skeleton's skull and thorax had distinctive saw cuts, which led investigators to believe

an autopsy had been performed. ■ **Case No. 99-4547, known as River:** On May 11, the body of a black man was found in the Detroit River, near Jefferson and Rademacher on Detroit's southwest side. He appeared to be between 30 and 35 years old, 5-foot-8 and 154 pounds. He had medium-length black hair and a partial beard on the sides of his cheeks.



Found May 11 in river

He wore a size small, green zippered jacket, a green and white multicolored plaid shirt, blue work pants covered with black blue jeans and size 10½ shoes.

■ **Case No. 99-8973, known as Marijuana Ring:**

The body of a black man was discovered Sept. 28 in an alley near Nashville and Hamburg on Detroit's east side.

He was a homicide victim and also had been burned. He wore glasses, had both ears pierced, was 5-foot-8 and weighed 149 pounds. He had recently had two teeth extracted. He wore two gold rings on his left hands, including one with a marijuana leaf emblem.

■ **Case 99-9858, known as Bishop:** The body of a black man, whose left forearm carried the tattoo "Bishop," was found Oct. 24 behind a gas station on 8 Mile near John R in Detroit. He was about 30 years of age, 5-foot-8 and 196 pounds. He had a thin mustache, a mole under one nostril and acne on his forehead. He was wearing blue jogging pants and a black T-shirt.



Found Sept. 28 in alley



Found Oct. 24 by gas station

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