

Her Work Gives Names to the Nameless

New Forensic Artist's Renderings Help Close Cases

By KATHLEEN CHARTER
Texas Medical Center News

A man, walking his dog on the jogging trail along the banks of a bayou, smells something eerily rotten in the air. Picking up the scent, his dog lurches off the path. As the dog abruptly halts in a tall patch of weeds, the man gasps in surprise ... the pair has stumbled upon a body so decomposed, it is unidentifiable.

Is this scenario real or a scene out of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation?" Neither - it's hypothetical. However, in either case, the services of a forensic artist might be required to help identify the body.

In May, the Joseph A. Jachimczyk

on facial reconstruction.

Luis A. Sanchez, Harris County's chief medical examiner said he is happy to have a well-rounded investigator like Skory on board.

The Harris County Medical Examiner's Office averages 75 to 120 unidentified cases each year. Weather conditions, Sanchez said, especially like those in the Gulf Coast area, cause exposed bodies to decompose rapidly, precluding identification.

"Forensic art is an expensive skill. It is cost-effective for the office and the county to have an in-house forensic investigator and artist in one," Sanchez said.

Sanchez said Skory's skills will save the county about \$2,000 per sketch, the rate commanded by an Austin contract artist that was hired when sketches were needed in the past.

Prior to accepting a position in Houston, Skory gained experience with the state of Virginia as a medicolegal death investigator. She performed two types of forensic art - sketches and facial reconstructions.

"I had really quick success with one particular facial reconstruction - positive identification was made within 30 hours of when it was published," Skory said.

Sanchez said when a forensic artist's work helps quickly identify a "John or Jane Doe," it also helps other offices and agencies with directing the investigation. With a positive identification, medical and social history can be obtained. This information may be essential to determining manner and cause of death.

Skory found the Harris County job after her Virginia job was cut in a workforce reduction.

"I started calling medical examiner's offices in every city in the United States that I would live in, to see if they could use my services," she said.

"I was impressed with Catyana's Virginia contributions and there was a need here," Sanchez said. "Her skills are now enhancing the Harris County

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DRAWING A CONCLUSION—Catyana Skory, the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office's newest forensic investigator, and the first who is specially trained as a forensic artist, works on a facial reconstruction sketch. The inset sketch is an example of a finished piece. If this sketch were released to the public, it might help identify the body of a "John Doe."

Forensic Center at the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office hired another forensic investigator, but one with these particular artistic and specially trained skills.

"I've always been an artist. My family is very artistic," said Catyana Skory.

Skory started her secondary education as a fine arts major at Colorado State University in Fort Collins before becoming interested in anthropological reconstruction. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in history and anthropology at State University of New York at New Paltz, which prepared her for a career in forensic anthropology. In addition, Skory added to her education with a master's degree in forensic science from George Washington University, where she focused

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Forensic Artist

(Continued from page 5)

Medical Examiner's Office's forensic investigation division."

The process of completing a facial reconstruction is complex. First, if there is any flesh left on the cadaver, the bones are boiled and thoroughly dried.

Skory said she is then given a skull and begins the process by placing tissue markers on the skull's surface. The markers, 21 of them, are made with long, thin erasers that are cut to different lengths. The lengths are based on the Rhine and Campbell Measurement Scale, the most widely used measurement scale in marking skulls for forensic reconstruction.

The scale was published by J.S. Rhine, Ph.D., and H.R. Campbell, D.D.S., in the October 1980 *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. By using black and white male and female cadavers, ranging in age from 12 to 71, they identified 21 points on the skull with different tissue depths by using a needle to probe the differences. Since 1980, there have been advances on this measurement scale. As interest in the subject increased, further studies identified tissue depths in other races. In addition, more advanced, accurate technology, such as CT scanning, was implemented to more accurately measure tissue depth, but through the years, the original principle has remained the same.

After the tissue markers are placed over the 21 points, modeling clay is molded over all and the deceased's form begins to take shape.

The reconstruction process, from marking to finish, may take anywhere from four days to two weeks, Skory said.

"I have a certificate in composite art

as well," she said. "I took a class on composite forensic art where I was given different sets of circumstances."

The assorted "scenes" in her portfolio draw an eye-opening picture. They include sketches of eyewitness descriptions, a sketch where she altered a person's image by adding a hat and glasses to their portrait, photos of cadavers with sketches of what they would look like if they were alive, and sketches that show age progression.

Skory's tools of the trade are sketching pencils with different lead weights, acid-free sketch and tracing paper, and a gum eraser.

When creating a facial reconstruction sketch, Skory first tapes tracing paper over a photo of a skull with visible tissue markers. She then uses her sketching pencils on the tracing paper, in much the same way she would use modeling clay over the skull, to shape the form of the deceased person. This type of sketch may take as few as eight or as many as 16 hours to complete.

The amount of time a sketch takes, Skory said, first depends on how long it takes to place the markers, then take and develop the photographs to scale.

She just finished her first sketch for the Harris County Medical Examiner's office. This sketch, of a child, will be released soon.

Skory said she hopes that anyone who sees the sketch will immediately step forward and give this child an identity.

"I hope that there is quick closure, because it is hard to comprehend how anyone could not know, or care, that a child is missing," Skory said. "It's sad, because most of the deaths we investigate are unnatural. The most important part of our job is helping people get closure and get the truth. I'm glad to be part of that." ■



RECONSTRUCTING AN ORIGINAL—Catyana Skory reconstructed the facial characteristics of an unidentified white male when she was a Virginia medicolegal death investigator. The 21 tissue markers, based on the Rhine and Campbell Measurement Scale, are visible under the modeling clay. A positive identification was made on this case within 30 hours of when the image was made public.

Restaurant Guide

Nick's Italian Restaurant

Fresh ingredients ... generous portions ... relaxed atmosphere ... moderate prices – if these items rank high on your dining checklist, then head to Nick's Pasta Place Italian Restaurant at 4057 Bellaire Blvd. Nick's offers a large selection with generous portions of "Cuisine Neapolitan," – sauce-based dishes with a Mediterranean influence.

As tempting as it may be to eat several pieces of the warm, complimentary garlic bread as you peruse the menu, save room – there is much more in store for this dining experience.

Each day Nick's menu spices up lunch and dinner specials with innovative versions of classic Italian dishes, as well as some culinary masterpieces of their own. The Linguine Pescatore features clams, muscles, calamari and shrimp in a zesty tomato sauce. The Pasta Italiana tosses spaghetti or linguini with Italian sausage, red, green and yellow bell peppers, and fresh mushrooms that have been sautéed with garlic in olive oil.

On the lighter side, Nick's offers lower-calorie menu items such as grilled salmon, grilled chicken, and steamed vegetables.

Other favorites include spaghetti topped with finely chopped, roasted garlic, and olive oil infused with basil, and Veal Scaloppini Marsala, where the tender veal cutlets are sautéed with fresh mushrooms in Marsala wine.

A glass of the house Chianti is sure to complement any of these dishes and more – even those traditionally complemented by whites and rosés.

Nick's warm and relaxed bistro-style atmosphere is open Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Children's and take-out menus are available. No reservations are required.

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