

Amanda Price
Commissioner

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Department of
Public Safety

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arrest Made Regarding Shelley Connolly Murder

Oregon man charged after DNA links him to killing and sex assault 41 years ago

September 3, 2019 (ANCHORAGE)—The Alaska State Troopers made an arrest in connection to the 1978 murder and sexual assault of 16-year-old Shelley Connolly. On September 3, 2019, 62-year-old Donald F. McQuade of Gresham, OR, was taken into custody and charged with murder in the first degree and murder in the second degree.

A little more than four decades ago, a Trooper was flagged down after the body of a 16-year-old girl was found down an embankment near Beluga Point next to the Seward Highway south of Anchorage. The Trooper secured the scene and called in investigators with the Criminal Investigation Bureau, now known as the Alaska Bureau of Investigation.

The state medical examiner at the time determined the manner of death was homicide and the victim had also been sexually assaulted.¹ Troopers identified the girl as Shelley Connolly, of Anchorage, when family called to report her missing after news of the murder was recounted in the local media. What Troopers did not know was the identity of the person who killed her. The case, despite the persistence of many investigators, eventually went cold.

In 1997, with the advent of forensic DNA technology, the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory at the request of the Cold Case Unit (CCU), developed a DNA profile of an unknown male from biological evidence collected at the autopsy. In 2003, the unidentified suspect DNA profile was uploaded into CODIS.² No match was ever generated from CODIS. In early 2019, the unknown suspect DNA profile from Shelley's case was submitted to Parabon Nanolabs³ in the hopes of determining the suspect's identity. Based on information discovered by Parabon utilizing genetic genealogy⁴, CCU and partnering

¹ In 1978, there was a statute of limitations in place for the crime of "Rape," as the statute was titled at the time. There was no statute of limitations at the time for murder charges.

² Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is a national database of DNA profiles from known individuals as well as from unknown suspects

³ Parabon Nanolabs is a Virginia-based company which utilizes extracted DNA to perform the genetic genealogy testing.

⁴ Genetic genealogy involves the use of a different type of DNA profile than is used in CODIS. The DNA profile is compared to the known profiles of persons in genealogical databases, like GEDmatch, to find persons that the suspect shares genetic information.

agencies identified Donald McQuade as a potential suspect. Subsequent DNA testing confirmed that McQuade, who was 21 at the time of Shelley’s murder, matched the suspect DNA profile. Investigation also verified McQuade lived in Alaska in 1978.

“Investigators have spent years analyzing this case looking for a viable lead. I have an overwhelming feeling of satisfaction that all that work has paid off,” said Inv. Randy McPherron, Alaska State Troopers Cold Case Investigator. “More than anything, I am relieved to be able to provide Shelley’s friends and family a sense of justice and the knowledge that Shelley was more than a name on an unsolved homicide sitting in a filing cabinet somewhere. Every single victim matters to us.”

The Department of Public Safety thanks the Gresham Police Department (GPD), GPD’s Investigation Unit, and the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office for their invaluable assistance provided during the investigation and arrest. DPS also recognizes all our past and present employees within the Troopers and the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory for all the dedication and hard work they put forth on this case over the years.

“Not only is DPS dedicated to giving each case the attention it deserves, we are committed to holding perpetrators of violent and senseless crimes accountable and always supporting victims and their families,” said Amanda Price, Commissioner of Public Safety. “No matter how much time passes, we do not give up on providing justice for victims and their loved ones.”

Any charges reported are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Anyone with information related to this crime is encouraged to contact AST at 907-269-5611.

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Photos of Shelley Connolly:

