

Sheriff



Larry Ashley, Okaloosa County Sheriff

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PERSEVERANCE LEADS TO INDICTMENT IN 33-YEAR OLD COLD CASE HOMICIDE



Leonard "Buddy" Phelps

Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Investigator Mike Irwin says a collaborative effort between the Sheriff's Office, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and Assistant State Attorney Robert Elmore helped lead to the indictment of a suspect in an unsolved Okaloosa murder that dates back to October 1981.

In addition to their other duties, OCSO Investigators have been continuing to work cold case murders, hoping new technologies or new relationships could provide evidence needed to bring justice to victims and families. Prior to this latest indictment, their efforts had led to resolutions in four previously unsolved cold case murders in the last three years; those include the deaths of Catherine Ainsworth in 1975, Donald Tidwell in 1985, Pluma Bell Sanford in 1987 and Ulai Sookruetai in 1988.

The body of 59-year old Leonard "Buddy" Phillips, a successful Niceville businessman, had been found behind his boat business in October 1981. Phelps had been beaten and shot.

Over the years, investigators put fresh eyes on the complex case and continued to dig and prod to no avail. The Phelps murder got renewed emphasis back in 2008/2009. Investigator Mike Irwin says the investigation ultimately took investigators to four states and involved multiple agencies. Their work eventually lead to indictments in two other unsolved cold cases in the state of Alabama - and this week to the indictment of 55-year old Jackie Long of Holt in the murder of "Buddy Phelps" in Niceville.

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The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office is accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation.

"The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office provides equal access and equal opportunity in employment and services and does not discriminate"

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The case however still remains active.

“The Phelps murder investigation is not over and we anticipate it will continue to progress,” said Investigator Irwin.

“The persistence and partnerships between Investigator Mike Irwin, the FDLE, State Attorney’s Office, and Alabama District Attorney Walt Merrill have brought news that some family and friends had waited many years to hear,” said Sheriff Larry Ashley. “I want to publicly thank those partners for their assistance and dedication as we move forward in pursuing justice”.



Jackie Long

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