

MONTGOMERY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
SHERIFF RAND HENDERSON

MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release

July 28, 2021

UPDATE: 1983 Cold Case Homicide Suspect Dies of Apparent Natural Causes

On July 26, 2021, Thomas Elvin Darnell who was arrested on a 1983 cold case murder has passed away while incarcerated at the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. Darnell had been in failing health even at the time of his arrest in May. Darnell had numerous medical issues and was on hospice care at the time of his death. A preliminary investigation has been conducted and it's believed his death is due to natural causes related to his medical history. An exact cause of death is pending the results of an autopsy.

The investigation is being worked jointly by the Texas Rangers and the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Homicide and Violent Crime Unit.

May 20, 2021

MCTXSheriff Makes Arrest in 1983 Cold Case Murder

On March 17, 1983, at about 3:00 am, a Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Deputy was on patrol in the 4000 block of IH-45 near League Line Road when he observed a fire burning in a wooded area to the east of his location. While investigating, the Deputy discovered the body of a white female that had been set aflame. An autopsy was later performed on the victim where it was learned she had been sexually assaulted, strangled, and traces of a male's DNA were found. In May of 1986, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) ran the victim's fingerprints which positively identified her as Laura Marie Purchase, a missing person from Houston, Texas.

In 2007, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Cold Case Squad resubmitted the unknown male's DNA found during the initial investigation. Self-professed serial killer Henry Lee Lucas originally confessed to this crime in 1983, and was convicted of this crime in 1986. However, he (along with his alleged co-defendant Otis Elwood Toole) was eliminated by DNA in 2008.



MONTGOMERY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE SHERIFF RAND HENDERSON

MEDIA ADVISORY

In October 2019, Investigators sent the DNA evidence for genealogy testing. An investigative lead generated from that genealogy report showed Thomas Elvin Darnell, a 75-year-old male from Kansas City, Kansas, as a potential suspect. A DNA search warrant for Thomas Darnell was obtained as a result of the investigation.

Montgomery County Cold Case Detectives went to Kansas City, Kansas on March 17, 2021 (38 years later to the day), and collected a known DNA sample from Darnell. On April 30, 2021 that DNA sample was positively matched to the unknown male's DNA profile collected from Laura Purchase. A warrant for Capital Murder was issued in Montgomery County, and Thomas Elvin Darnell was arrested at his home on May 11, 2021. On May 20, 2021, Darnell was extradited to Montgomery County and is currently in the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Jail on Capital Murder charges with no bond.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office would like to thank the following agencies for their assistance in this investigation: Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, Kansas City Kansas Police Department's Violent Crimes Task Force/SWAT Team, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.



Scott Spencer, Lieutenant
Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Administrative Services
Follow us @MCTXSheriff

mctxsheriff.org    

