



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 27, 2024

Contact: Lisa Ambrose, lambros2@ramapo.edu 201-684-7141

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Investigative Genetic Genealogy Heats Up: Student Research Leads to Hot Case Identification

The Ramapo College of New Jersey IGG Center solved its first hot case in collaboration with St. Louis County authorities to achieve the successful identification of "St. Louis John Doe," marking a new frontier in real-time forensic investigations

Mahwah, NJ- The Ramapo College of New Jersey Investigative Genetic Genealogy Center (IGG) has aided law enforcement across the country in cold cases since opening its doors in [December 2022](#). Now, students in the [IGG Certificate Program](#) were able to use existing IGG technology for a hot case this time, leading to the successful identification of the decedent in a St. Louis County Medical Examiner's Office hot case named "St. Louis John Doe."

In October 2021, foot and leg bones, with the shoe still on, were found in Florissant, St. Louis, Missouri in Coldwater Creek. In February 2024, Dr. Lindsay Trammell, forensic anthropologist with the St. Louis County Medical Examiner's Office, contacted the [Ramapo College IGG Center](#) with a request to work on this case. Trammell was encouraged to contact the center by a colleague in another local medical examiner's office who found success partnering with the center on an unidentified case.

Within one month, extract from previous DNA testing was sent to Genologue in Tucker, Georgia, for whole genome sequencing to create a DNA profile for the unidentified decedent. Bioinformatics was performed by Intermountain Forensics in Salt Lake City, Utah. In May 2024, a usable profile was generated and uploaded to GEDmatch Pro.

Students in the Ramapo College [IGG Certificate Program](#) began investigative genetic genealogy and, within days, identified a potential candidate for the identity of St. Louis John Doe. This candidate was presented to Dr. Trammell and detectives from the St. Louis County Police Department Bureau of Crimes Against Persons on May 23, 2024.

A relative of the decedent was contacted, confirming that St. Louis John Doe was missing and not heard from since 2021. The family agreed to have a DNA reference sample collected.

On July 16, 2024, the identification put forward by the IGG Center was confirmed by the [Bureau of Crimes Against Persons](#) unit in the [St. Louis County Police Department](#). At the family's request, the identity of the decedent will not be shared publicly.



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This was a hot case, which generally refers to the presence of active, investigative leads. The use of IGG in hot cases is a fairly new and growing concept. "IGG has traditionally been used as a 'last ditch' investigative effort, primarily in cold cases where there are no other investigative avenues to pursue," said Cairenn Binder, assistant director of the Ramapo College IGG center and director of the IGG certificate program. "Seeing as how this relatively new technology has effectively given new hope in thousands of DNA investigations, it should be looked at earlier in investigations to more quickly resolve cases before they go cold." In violent crime, IGG can help prevent violent criminals from reoffending sooner or ever again.

Because St. Louis John Doe went missing only three years ago, the confirmation of his death for the family is hard to process when holding onto hope of his return. The IGG Center respects the family's wishes to keep the identity private.

There are additional benefits of employing the use of IGG earlier in unidentified cases. One is the likelihood of more usable DNA for recent cases, as DNA swabs were not routinely collected prior to the 1990s. A second is how social media can help provide information. "If a person recently went missing, we can sometimes find clues they left behind on the Internet," said Binder.

To date, the work of IGG Center students and staff led to the confirmation and announcement of six cases, with another eight awaiting positive identification, as part of a caseload of 65 cases in just two short years.

"My experience working with Ramapo staff and students has been exceptional, not only because of the identification that allowed one family to have answers about what happened to their loved one, but because they are genuinely invested and interested in their work," said Trammell.

The majority of the cases are from New Jersey, but the center also offers pro bono work on cases across the United States including [Arizona](#), California, Florida, Maine, Minnesota, [Missouri](#), Montana, Ohio, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, and [Wisconsin](#).

To learn more about the work in the Ramapo College IGG Center, visit ramapo.edu/IGG.

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ABOUT RAMAPO COLLEGE

Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and



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international and intercultural understanding. The comprehensive college is situated among the beautiful Ramapo Mountains, is within commuting distance to New York City, was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondéNast Traveler*, and boasts the best on-campus housing in New Jersey per Niche.com. Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice.