



INSIDE THE STAR

PINELLAS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE BI-WEEKLY NEWS

"THIS BI-WEEKLY NEWSLETTER IS ANOTHER STEP IN MY EFFORT TO GIVE INTERESTED RESIDENTS THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS HERE, AT THE PINELLAS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

I VALUE YOUR FEEDBACK AND LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUING OUR DIALOGUE ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY."

-SHERIFF BOB GUALTIERI



Cold Case Unit Seeks Answers in Unsolved Violent Crimes

Two large boxes filled with documents sit at Detective Ronald Chalmers' desk. A stack of old photos is laid out ready to be analyzed. It has been 34 years since Eleanor Swift and Opal Weil were murdered, but Cold Case Unit detectives are still working hard to find their killer. Although much time has passed, the hope to find answers still lives in the hearts of the victims' relatives. The commitment to keep the community safe, the drive to bring the murderers to justice, and the duty to give the loved ones answers is what keeps Detective Chalmers and Detective Walter Bonasoro motivated when they walk into work at the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO).

They have 40 unsolved murder cases, 9 rapes, 29 missing people, and 2 suspicious deaths on their list of cases to work. These two members of the Cold Case Unit focus on a few cases at a time but are familiar with all of them going back to 1955.

"These cases have been worked by very good detectives in the past, and for whatever reason, they were not solved," Detective Bonasoro said. "So it's our job to pick up where they left off, and a lot of times, go through these cases word for word, search through boxes for clues, look through all the photos, and comb through evidence meticulously to hopefully find a lead."

Not only do the two detectives look at the cases with a fresh perspective and review every detail of the case, but they also re-submit pieces of evidence to the PCSO Forensic Sciences Division and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Lab.

In the cases of Swift and Weil, two similar murders just days apart from each other, DNA evidence was collected, but the technology was not available at the time to identify a suspect. Decades later, Detective Chalmers is sending the DNA evidence to forensic experts in an effort to identify a suspect. Along with DNA advancements, fingerprinting and genealogy databases are forging new paths that lead to the perpetrators.

When the Cold Case Unit started in 2017, Detective Bonasoro and Detective Chris Lyons (who now works in the Robbery/Homicide Unit) worked a violent rape case from 1987 that resulted in a successful arrest. They had decided to re-submit a fingerprint to the sheriff office's Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Division from the scene of the crime and found a suspect who was in their database due to an offense he committed after the rape. They tracked down the suspect who was living in Mississippi and arrested him. He is currently in the Pinellas County Jail awaiting trial.

Since the Cold Case Unit started, the detectives have successfully solved four cold cases. They also found multiple leads in other cases, but the victims or witnesses involved don't always cooperate.

"These case files do not stay in the closet," Detective Bonasoro said. "They come to our desks, and sometimes it can take years to discover a lead. A lot of times we work past quitting hours, bring documents home with us to read, and go knocking on the doors of people after 20 years have gone by in the hopes they will cooperate with us. It's challenging, but very satisfying work."

Detective Bonasoro and Detective Chalmers work on different cases, but they also help each other, which can include traveling out of state to talk to witnesses and suspects. Recently, Detective Bonasoro has been reviewing sexual battery cases while Detective Chalmers has been investigating the 1987 homicides and an unidentified John Doe from 1988.

While Detective Bonasoro has lived in Pinellas County his whole life and has worked at the sheriff's office for 22 years, Detective Chalmers recently moved to Tampa Bay after working on violent crimes in Reno, NV for 14 years. Though they have different backgrounds, they both bring different perspectives and experience to the crime scenes they meticulously analyze.

"The word I hear a lot from victims' family members is hope," Detective Chalmers said. "They feel renewed with hope every time the sheriff's office calls them and says they are still looking into the unsolved crime, and that is very powerful. But, we can't be successful without the community's help. We have to work together. No matter how insignificant you may think a piece of information about a case is, it could potentially lead to new developments and ultimately to the person who committed the crime. Please call and provide that information, and we will do our due diligence to go investigate all those leads. The community plays a significant role in helping us solve these crimes."

To see a list of the PCSO's unsolved violent crimes, visit: <https://pcswcweb.com/murder-investigations>

If you have any information related to these cases, please call the Cold Case Unit at: 727-582-6307.

25th Annual Charity Golf Tournament

Join us Monday, September 27, 2021, at the 25th Annual Charity Golf Tournament to help support the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches.

Become a sponsor, player, or both, and enjoy a day at the prestigious East Lake Woodlands Country Club. Players will enjoy a round of golf, continental breakfast, lunch, contests, drawings, and many player amenities.

Your participation is very important in supporting the dedicated work at the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches, which provides a secure and positive atmosphere for troubled and neglected youth.

Sponsors and interested participants can find more information about the event and register

online at: pcsweb.com/charity-golf-tournament

The registration deadline is Monday, September 13, 2021.



**Pinellas County Students Graduate
From 2021 Explorer Academy**



According to Deputy Nathan Mowatt, the advisor of the Explorer Program, many young people think being a deputy only involves writing tickets and responding to crime. But the annual Explorer Academy seeks to correct that assumption and exposes students to the diverse opportunities in a law enforcement career.

The week of August 2-6, 2021, young adults interested in law enforcement attended the Explorer Academy and had a firsthand glimpse of the different roles a deputy or police officer can serve in the community.

Throughout the week, the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Gulfport Police Department, St. Petersburg Police Department, and Pinellas Park Police Department partnered together to show the students special areas of law enforcement, like SWAT, the Canine Unit, the Pinellas County Justice Center, and more. The participants also learned about ethics in a classroom setting and performed physical fitness challenges, including running a mile and completing a swim test. At the end of the week, the explorers received a certificate of completion.

Fifteen-year-old Osceola High School student, Dakota Jokela, graduated from the Explorer Academy earlier this month and is excited to participate in the PCSO Explorer Post #900 Program this year. Dakota said she has wanted to be a police officer since she was seven, but now she is more interested in becoming a forensic scientist after completing the academy.

"So far, the Explorer Program has been really cool," she said. "Forensics was the most interesting to me because of the DNA and fingerprinting. I recommend the Explorer Program because you get to learn what police officers do and why."

Deputy Mowatt knows exactly how much of an influence the Explorer Program can have on a young person since he was a member of the PCSO Explorer Post #900 from 2007 to 2009.

"My experience with the explorers got me involved with the sheriff's office at an early age and allowed me to see several different aspects of it," Deputy Mowatt said. "It gave me that hands-on experience to see if it was the right career path for me. Once I got out of college, I knew that's what I wanted to do, so I became a deputy at the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and worked in several different units. Once the position to lead the Explorer Program opened up, I jumped on the opportunity because I already know how the program works, and now I can give back to the new generation of explorers."

Students enrolled in high school, virtual school, or home school can join the PCSO Explorer Post #900. Currently, the sheriff's office has 25 students in the group, however, anyone who meets the requirements can enter at any point during the school year.

"This is a great program," Deputy Mowatt affirmed. "It teaches many good life skills, responsibility, and we have a lot of fun. If anyone is interested, they shouldn't hesitate to apply."

If you or your child is interested in joining the PCSO Explorer Post #900, please fill out an application online at: <https://www.pcsoweb.com/Post900>.



Job Feature: Grants Specialist

The Grants Specialist serves in the Strategic Planning Division and primarily assists with obtaining grant funding to support agency projects and programs. The person in this role will also oversee grants' development and implementation by reporting the associated activities and financial information. To learn more and apply, [click here](#).



“Leading The Way For A Safer Pinellas”

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