Website spotlights those missing from Acadiana

By Anastasia Semien

They disappeared and left loved ones behind. Most have been missing for years. Some have been missing for decades.

But the search goes on. These missing persons are the purview of the Louisiana Repository for Missing and Unidentified Persons Information Program.

The program was started by anthropologists at LSU's FACES Lab and scientists at a Louisiana laboratory to help law enforcement agencies throughout the state with missing and unidentified persons cases.

The FACES Lab, which stands for Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services, has been in existence for decades, research associate Helen Bouzon said.

“Our primary function is to do forensic anthropology,” she said.

The group does things like create forensic profiles and analyze skeletal remains for agencies around the state. A law passed in 2006 that established them as the repository for detailson missing or unidentified persons in Louisiana, go to the FACES database at www.lsu.edu/faceslab.

Lab works up to 50 new cases each year

By Cole Avery

Claxton Mark Mayo was involved in a traffic accident on Interstate 20 on March 30, 2011. Surveillance footage shows him entering a Ouachita Parish truck stop, but the cameras never filmed him leaving.

That’s the last time anyone or anything has seen Mayo. He was reported missing to the Bienville Parish Sheriff’s Office more than two years ago, and he’s never been found.

Now the case joins more than 200 others in the missing persons database operated by the FACES Lab at Louisiana State University.

Director Mary Manhein and her staff are working with local law enforcement agencies across Louisiana to compile a central database of all the state’s missing and unidentified people.

“Nobody is going out and aggressively searching for these cases like we are,” Manhein said. “We’re the only state that has an effort on this kind of scale.”

The FACES Lab (an acronym for Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services) has been...
Lab

Continued from Page 1A

compiling the database since 2004. It currently has 236 Louisians in its missing person database and 129 unidentified bodies from Louisiana.

The lab also has 31 out of state persons in its database and assists other states during disasters such as the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster and hurricanes.

In 2006, the Legislature established the lab as the Louisiana Repository for Unidentified and Missing Persons Information Program. The law also secured funding for the lab through LSU's budget.

Bodies discovered by state law enforcement agencies that cannot immediately be identified are sent to the lab for analysis. Once there, researchers take DNA samples and note of any other identifiable features. Then the DNA samples are added to the FBI's database to see if any matches can be found.

Using the information they gather, the lab can reconstruct the facial features of what the body looked like before decomposing, which can help identify the deceased.

Lab workers can perform similar procedures based on photographs to age people that have been missing for decades.

Manhein said her lab might range anywhere between 50 and 50 new cases on unidentified or missing people a year. She said there are six full-time staff and eight LSU graduate students working on the project.

"I'm driven by this. It's so important to me to get these cases solved because there are people who have been missing for decades."

Mary Manhein, director of the LSU FACES Laboratory, stands in the lab next to a human skull. "A lot of these cases get solved through the tenacity of detectives," Manhein said.

The lab's work is becoming more important to law enforcement agencies.

"A lot of times, inmates will bring about what they did. You never know who might be listening," Newman said.

Crime Stoppers is in the process of gathering new cases for a second deck, scheduled to be released early next year. Newman said there will once again look to the FACES lab for cases to put on the decks.

Another goal for the group is to get the new deck put into parochial schools as a way for children to learn about the lab and its facilities to reach even more missing people.

"If you solve one case, look at the closure you've given to that family. At least they know their loved one has been found," Newman said.

Follow Cole Avery on Twitter @cole_avery1

Lab

Continued from Page 1A

for all of the state's missing and unidentified cases.

"This puts it all in one place," Bouzon said.

"It will help fund this initiative, which is a "huge benefit to smaller parishes," she added. Her team actively searches cases and visits parishes around the state to collect information.

There are several missing persons cases in Acadia Parish that have gone unsolved for years.

Lafayette Parish

Keishoa Marie Felix disappeared on April 30 of last year from her aunt's mobile home in Duson. At the time, she was 15 years old with a 1-year-old daughter and in the custody of the state.

Felix was initially described as a runaway, and her status was upgraded to a missing person July 23, 2012. Charges were eventually dropped against everyone who was initially arrested in her disappearance — her aunt's boyfriend and her brother.

The FACES lab describes Felix as a white female with dark brown hair. She is 5 feet 6 inches and weighs 120 pounds.

Felix has continued to search for Felix and held events in her honor. Volunteer Laplace's "Cash" Burris was recently hired as a volunteer investigator and has been searching for Felix for the past year.

"It will continue to be my prayer that one day Keishoa appears and everyone can get closure. We have not given up, nor will we," Charles said.

Capt. Kip Judice with the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office said his office is still searching for Felix and her case is definitely not cold.

"She's still an active missing person," Judice said last week.

St. Landry Parish

Sandra Ann "Cash" Burris was last seen July 25, 2005, leaving her job at a St. Landry Parish restaurant. She was 35 at the time.

Burris is described as a white female with green eyes and brown hair. She is 5 feet 6 inches and weighs 114 pounds.

Dale LaFleur was last seen July 13, 2011, leaving his Port Barre home in a blue Mazda Miata with Louisiana license plate number 203729. LaFleur's neighbors said he was depressed because of a recent prostate cancer diagnosis. He was headed toward U.S. Route 90.

Family and friends said LaFleur left his dog, Tiger, untended, something he would have never done. He is described as a white male with blue eyes and gray hair. He is 5 feet 9 inches and weighs 175 pounds.

Sheriff's deputies probed the river and searched the woods near LaFleur's home weeks after he first went missing. Deputies searched a levee as well. A Louisiana State Police helicopter also searched for LaFleur.

Acadia Parish

Donna Marie Gonzales was last seen April 7, 1992, selling cancer policies door-to-door in Rayne. She was wearing a black and white checkered blouse, black pants and black shoes. She was carrying a brown briefcase.

Gonzales was 28 at the time of her disappearance. She wore glasses and is described as white with brown eyes and reddish-brown hair. She is 5 feet 3 inches and weighs 110 pounds.

Gonzales' car was found near where she was last seen with her purse in the trunk.

St. Martin Parish

Judy Ann Gary was last seen Aug. 1, 1986, in St. Martinville, barefoot and wearing a red bathrobe. She was 19 at the time.

According to the Doe Network, the international center for unidentified and missing persons, Gary was married with children.

Gary's Doe Network file also states that her family tired to file a missing persons report, but was told she was "a wild girl" and she would come home when she was ready.

There has been no activity on her Social Security number since her disappearance.

An official report was never filed with an agency in her case.

Officials with the St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office and Acadian Parish Sheriff's Office did not respond to inquiries made by The Daily Advertiser at press time.

Mary Manhein, director of the LSU FACES Laboratory, stands in the lab next to a human skull. "A lot of these cases get solved through the tenacity of detectives," Manhein said.