



The Examiner

Spring 2026 Issue



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings, Everyone!

I was considering making this an informational letter, reminding everyone that nominations for the WCMEA Board elections are closing April 8th, that absentee ballots will be available April 17th (with a return deadline of May 16th), and that the WCMEA Annual Summer Conference will be held June 14-17th, in Wausau. But then I decided not to do that. I also considered letting everyone know of the Board's decision to contract with a new website developer (and the fact that we may see some results from that project before the summer conference!). But, again, no.

Instead, I have come to realize that this is likely the last letter to the membership that I may write as a board member of the WCMEA. And this has me reflecting on my time with the Association and committing to another message I would like to share.

At the January Conference, Al Klimek and I were sitting together talking (yes, at the bar—if that really matters), appreciating the energy and excitement in the room from our members, and suddenly it occurred to us: we're it. Along with PJ Schoebel (who's really old, by the way) and a few others, we represent the few remaining WCMEA members from the early days of the new millennium. For many of you, the names of those who sat on our Board and attended our past meetings are familiar, perhaps even mythical. [Some of those old stories we tell are actually true though.] From John Stanley to John Larsen, Scott Rifleman to Peggy Peterson, Ray Wosepka to "Good Barry" and "Bad Barry" (I could go on and on)...indeed the reason for the success of the WCMEA is due to a number of people that gave their time and energy to keep the lights on and make the wheels turn.

I recall a time when my son expressed some frustration to me at being the 'low man on the pole' to which I responded with an explanation of how time works. Eventually, time plays a hand in everything, after all. Without exception, everyone in every workplace and every organization moves on—some by choice, some not. "Who do you think has to take over for them when that happens?" I asked him. He hesitated. "You!" I exclaimed. "You and everyone like you who have worked and trained and learned so that you could take over their roles when it's time." I think it made sense to him, and he seemed suddenly more accepting of his responsibility to be ready for this inevitable future.

So, what about you? Time spares no one and many of our current active members will someday fade into history, leaving someone else to keep the Association alive and well for decades to come. That's you.

And there's something wonderful about others stepping forward and continuing the work of those that came before. It offers the WCMEA Change...Progress...Fresh ideas...New vitality.

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So many of you have so much to offer, whether you realize it or not. You are our next leaders, our next teachers, our next role models. And before you know it, there will be another group of people behind you, deciding who among them will assume the responsibilities that you took over. And, so it goes.

Over the years, I have met so many of you and have come to appreciate your abilities, knowledge and determination: commodities that Wisconsin death investigation, and its representative body (the WCMEA), needs in order to continue into the future. I recognize so much potential in our current membership—and all you have to do to share this, is to step forward. That's what I did over 20 years ago—I made a call and asked, "how can I play a part?"

In 2004, the idea that I would be reflecting on all of this in 2026 was not even conceivable to me. How could I have known that my years as a member of the WCMEA would be so rewarding and enjoyable? I've met some of my most respected friends and colleagues through this association. I've made valuable connections and learned more than I could ever have imagined back in the beginning. And now, for myself and my contemporaries, time is quickly leading us towards the sunset. So, who do you think will take over for us when that happens? No need to hesitate. It's your time.

With Great Respect and Admiration,

Doug Kelley, MD
WCMEA President

January 2026 Conference Highlights

The 2026 Winter WCMEA Conference was held in Neenah at the Best Western Premier Bridgewood Resort Hotel & Conference Center January 26th through January 28th. There were approximately 60 registered attendees who enjoyed presentations on topics ranging from Misconceptions in Medicolegal Death Investigations and Ways Your Body is Trying to Kill You to Adventures in Forensic Anthropology and Wisconsin Toxicology and Drug Trends. There were up to 18 ABMDI credits available!

This conference proved to be a wonderful opportunity for case presentations from our peers as well as networking and relationship building.

The WCMEA would like to thank Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau, Debbie Stodola, WCMEA 1st Vice President, and the education committee for all of their hard work and commitment in putting together this seminar. Additional thanks to the staff at Best Western Premier Bridgewood Resort, as well as the many presenters and exhibitors for their time, knowledge, and generosity.

The WCMEA would also like to acknowledge our generous sponsors: American Tissue Services Foundation, Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office, and Versiti Organ and Tissue. Without their support, the WCMEA would not be able to continue providing training opportunities for its members.

Please mark your calendars for the next WCMEA training opportunity! The 2026 Summer Conference will be held at the beautiful Jefferson Street Inn located in Wausau. The event will run from June 15th through June 17th. Stay tuned for more details!

Honoring Price County Coroner James D. Dalbesio III

Price County recently lost a dedicated public servant with the passing of James Dominic Dalbesio III, who served the community as Price County Coroner for more than three decades. Dalbesio passed away on February 10, 2026, at the age of 78.

Born April 21, 1947, in Ashland, Wisconsin, James Dalbesio spent much of his life serving the residents of Price County with quiet professionalism and compassion. Throughout his long tenure as coroner—beginning in June 1992—he handled one of the most difficult responsibilities in local government: investigating deaths and working with families during moments of loss.

Over the course of more than 30 years in office, Dalbesio became a trusted figure for law enforcement, first responders, and the many families he assisted during challenging times. The role of county coroner requires not only technical knowledge and investigative skill, but also empathy and respect for those experiencing grief. James brought those qualities to his work each day, providing steady leadership and ensuring that the duties of the office were carried out with care and dignity.

Following his death, the Office of the Governor announced that applications were being accepted to fill the vacancy created by Dalbesio's death. The governor's appointment will fill the position for the remainder of the current term, which runs through January 4, 2027.

Dalbesio's legacy is one of service, integrity, and compassion for the community he called home. The WCMEA extends its gratitude for his long-standing dedication and honors the lasting impact he made through his work as coroner.



New Ozaukee County Medical Examiner



Ozaukee County welcomed Ian Luecke as Medical Examiner. Ian has been serving in the role as Interim Medical Examiner since July 2025 and was recently recommended for appointment by the Public Safety Committee.

Ian brings a strong background in medicolegal death investigation and emergency response. Prior to joining Ozaukee County, he served as a Deputy Medical Examiner in Waukesha County, worked as a researcher at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and previously served as an Emergency Medical Technician in the Milwaukee area. His experience across clinical, investigative, and emergency settings provides a well-rounded perspective for the role.

Ian holds Bachelor of Science degrees in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and has extensive experience in medicolegal death investigation. He currently lives in Wauwatosa.

Please join me in congratulating Ian on his new role!

Cold Case Identification Unit

The Cold Case Identification Unit (CCIU) is a multi-agency collaborative initiative that brings together personnel from the Wisconsin Department of Justice – Division of Criminal Investigation, Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory, Milwaukee Police Department – Missing Persons Unit, and the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner’s Office.

Formally established in fall 2025, the unit is composed of special agents, law enforcement officers, medicolegal death investigators, crime analysts, and a forensic anthropologist—reflecting a truly multidisciplinary approach.



Mission and Purpose

The mission of the CCIU is to re-examine longstanding cold cases involving unidentified human remains and missing persons through modern forensic science, advanced investigative techniques, and coordinated interagency collaboration.

By leveraging advancements such as forensic genetic genealogy, enhanced DNA and fingerprint analysis, expanded digital record comparison, and integration with national databases, the unit works to restore identities to the unidentified, resolve missing person cases, and provide answers and closure to families.

Cases: Solved and Under Review

The CCIU focuses on cases involving unidentified human remains and missing persons, some dating back decades. The oldest unidentified adult case dates to 1974, while the oldest unidentified infant case dates to 1971.

The unit actively reviews a broad range of open cases, prioritizing those with viable forensic evidence for retesting, as well as cases that may benefit from emerging technologies and updated investigative strategies. Each case represents an opportunity to uncover the truth and restore identity.

The unit is currently investigating a 1982 case involving an unidentified female recovered from the Milwaukee River in downtown Milwaukee, WI. New investigative leads are being actively pursued and show promise for resolution.

A recent success involved the identification of previously unidentified human remains recovered from the Menomonee River in Milwaukee County. Initial remains were discovered in 2008, with additional remains located in 2020. Although the remains were confirmed as a DNA match to one another, no identification was made through the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS).

Ultimately, identification was achieved through coordinated interagency collaboration. This effort included a comprehensive review of active and long-term missing person cases, careful interpretation of the forensic anthropological assessment, and a wide spread targeted search for medical imaging associated with a suspected identity.

Relevant antemortem medical imaging was located, and a detailed comparison between postmortem and antemortem X-rays—focusing on unique skeletal features—resulted in a positive identification. The forensic anthropological assessment proved critical in guiding the investigative direction and initially linking the remains to a long-term missing person.

This case marked the first identification achieved by the CCIU, a significant milestone that emphasizes the value of multidisciplinary collaboration. It has further strengthened the unit’s commitment to resolving additional cases and restoring identities to the unidentified while providing long-awaited answers to families.

Collaboration and Support

The CCIU is available to provide guidance, consultation, and collaborative support to medical examiner and coroner offices, as well as law enforcement agencies working on cases involving unidentified human remains and missing persons. The unit strongly encourages agencies to submit and maintain comprehensive case entries in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) to maximize identification potential through national data sharing.

Close coordination between medical examiner or coroner offices and the law enforcement agency with primary investigative jurisdiction is essential to advancing these cases. Collaborative, multidisciplinary efforts—paired with the effective use of modern forensic tools and national databases—significantly enhance the likelihood of identification and case resolution.

Through partnership and proactive information sharing, the CCIU aims to support agencies in resolving cases, restoring identities, and providing long-awaited answers and closure to families.

Contact Information

The Cold Case Identification Unit (CCIU) welcomes inquiries, information sharing, and collaboration for investigating agencies.

Agencies may contact participating partners directly for case-specific matters. When reaching out, please include relevant case information to assist with review and follow-up.

Michael Simley – Medicolegal Death Investigator Manager
Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office
(414) 223-1200 | michael.simley@milwaukeecountywi.gov

Jamie Sromalla – Police Officer
Milwaukee Police Department – Sensitive Crimes Division: Missing Persons Unit
(414) 935-7405 | jsroma@milwaukee.gov

Neil McGrath – Special Agent
Wisconsin Department of Justice – Division of Criminal Investigation
(262) 939-2994 | neil.mcgrath@wisdoj.gov

Ann Shaw – Special Agent
Wisconsin Department of Justice – Division of Criminal Investigation
(608) 381-2193 | ann.shaw@wisdoj.gov

Dr. Jordan Karsten – Forensic Anthropologist
Wisconsin Department of Justice – Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory
(414) 216-1296 | jordan.karsten@wisdoj.gov



CCIU- Pictured left to right:

Ann Shaw (Special Agent - DCI), Michael Simley (Medicolegal Death Investigator Manager - MCMEO), Melissa Marchant (Missing Persons Clearinghouse - DCI), Jamie Sromalla (Police Officer - MPD), Fawn Schwandt (Sergeant - MPD), Kim Sternhagen (Investigative Analyst - MPD), Neil McGrath (Special Agent - DCI), Dr. Jordan Karsten (Forensic Anthropologist - WSCL)

Submitted by Michael Simley, Medicolegal Death Investigator Manager, Milwaukee County ME Office

Interesting Deaths in Wisconsin.....



- **In Brown County-** An 82-year-old female died in a house fire. The Green Bay Metro Fire Department responded to a structure fire in Bellevue. Dispatch initially reported that two people were trapped inside the residence. When crews arrived, they were met with significant smoke billowing from the home, with one resident evacuated. Crews worked to find the second person, who was found and removed from the home; however, they were pronounced dead on scene. The other victim, an 83-year-old man was taken to a local hospital for treatment. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.
- **In Burnett County-** Three people died in a fire. The fire was called into the Burnett County 911 Dispatch Center as a structure fire in the Town of Addison. The blaze originated at a structure within an auto salvage property. The structure was fully engulfed, and three fire departments were called to assist. Once the fire was under control, three known occupants of the home were found deceased. The fire remains under investigation.
- **In Dane County-** A 34-year-old man was shot and killed. Officers responded to the city's south side and found a person suffering from a gunshot wound. Officers provided aid to the person, who died on scene. Investigators believed the attack had been targeted. Two people have since been arrested and charged in connection with the crime.
- **In Fond du Lac County-** A 35-year-old woman died in a camper fire. The Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Department received multiple 911 calls reporting a camper engulfed in flames at a campground in the town of Byron. An adult male and three children were able to escape the camper safely, but a woman was reported trapped inside. While firefighters worked to put out the blaze, the woman was found inside the camper and pronounced dead at the scene. The fire was believed to have started in the kitchen area, though the cause remains under investigation. The man and three children were treated for non-life-threatening injuries.
- **In Kenosha County-** A high school student was killed, and two other teens were wounded in an attempted robbery. Police officers were dispatched for a med call and reported gunshots in the city of Kenosha. When officers arrived on scene, they found a black SUV parked with the driver's door open and passenger's side windows shattered. Someone was performing CPR on a 16-year-old boy on the street. The boy died from multiple gunshot wounds. A 19-year-old and 15-year-old were also injured.
- **In Marathon County-** Two people, a 30-year-old man and a 20-year-old woman, died in separate skiing incidents at Granite Peak. The two incidents have similarities. Both skiers hit trees. Both skiers were wearing helmets. And both were with other people. Granite Peak Ski Patrol was the first to respond to the individuals. Both days had minimal fresh snowfall, and the temperatures were in the 20s. The time someone died while skiing at Granite Peak was three years ago; however, that person died of a cardiac event.
- **In Milwaukee County-** A 66-year-old woman was bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat. The woman's fiancé called police to report the incident, saying the woman's son had fled the scene after the attack. Officers responded and found the woman face down with a wooden baseball bat on top of her. They found blood on the bat and a puddle of blood around her head. She was pronounced dead at the scene. The woman's son was taken into custody at the casino. He admitted to hitting his mother after they argued over silver coins and money. He has been charged with first-degree intentional homicide.

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Interesting Deaths Continued

- **In Milwaukee County-** A woman was accidentally killed by her teenaged son. The fatal incident occurred when the teen attempted to stop his stepfather from assaulting his mother. The teen fired multiple shots at his stepfather during an argument, unaware that his mother was in the line of fire. The woman was transported to a local hospital where she later died.
- **In Monroe County-** A person died after a crash near Tomah. The crash occurred on I94 involving a semi-truck and passenger vehicle. Both vehicles were fully engulfed in flames. The driver of the passenger vehicle suffered fatal injuries.
- **In Oneida County-** A 76-year-old man died as the result of a collision between a snowmobile and a SUV. The man was attempting to cross the highway and did not see the SUV which struck the snowmobile, causing it to spin. The man fell off the snowmobile onto the pavement and was taken to a local hospital for treatment. He was transferred to a Milwaukee area hospital for continuation of care where he later succumbed to his injuries and died.
- **In Ozaukee County-** A 57-year-old man died in a two-vehicle crash in the Town of Cedarburg. The man was driving a pick-up truck southbound when it began to drift over the centerline. The truck crossed into the northbound lane and struck a school bus head-on. The school bus was occupied only by the driver; no students were on the bus at the time of the crash. The bus driver sustained minor injuries and was transported to a local hospital. The driver of the pick-up truck was pinned inside of the vehicle and required extrication. Despite lifesaving efforts, he was pronounced dead on scene.
- **In Sawyer County-** A 61-year-old woman was stabbed to death. The Sawyer County Sheriff's Office responded to home to reports of a deceased woman. When they arrived, they found the woman's body with stab wounds. A 37-year-old man had been identified as a suspect and later arrested at a nearby hotel. The man had been living in a cabin on the woman's property but was kicked out after a heated argument. He has been charged with first degree intentional homicide.
- **In Walworth County-** A 62-year-old woman was found dead in a town of Lafayette home. The Walworth County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call for a disturbance. The call was disconnected, and squads were immediately dispatched. Deputies found two men inside the home when they arrived. Both were fighting, injured and bleeding. They were eventually separated and detained. While deputies searched the home, they found the woman in a bedroom, unconscious. She died in the home despite lifesaving efforts. Both men were taken to a hospital, and one of them was later taken into custody and has been charged with first-degree attempted homicide.
- **In Waukesha County-** A 66-year-old man, his 26-year-old son and the son's dog were killed in an early morning house fire. The Brookfield Fire Department was dispatched to a fire. When crews arrived, they found heavy fire conditions and reports of people still inside the home. Firefighters immediately began search-and-rescue operations while working to extinguish the fire. Two people and a dog were found inside the home. One person was taken to a local hospital where they later died. The second person and a dog were pronounced dead on scene. Three police officers were injured and taken to the hospital. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.
- **In Winnebago County-** Two drivers, and 83-year-old man and a 32-year-old man, died in a head-on collision just outside of Omro. Authorities are looking for witnesses who might be able to assist in the investigation.

Jennifer Schroeter
Kenosha County Medical Examiner's Office
1000 55th Street
Kenosha, WI 53140

Training Opportunities

WCMEA Summer Conference

6/15-6/17, 2026
Wausau, WI

Wisconsin Association of Homicide Investigators

4/21-24, 2026
Wisconsin Dells, WI

<https://wisdoj.cventevents.com/event/2026-wahi/summary>

John R. Teggatz Forensic Seminar

10/28-29, 2026
Milwaukee, WI

Death Investigation Academy

Online Training

[Death Investigation Academy
\(ditacademyonline.org\)](http://ditacademyonline.org)

IACME Annual Conference

7/16-23, 2026
Las Vegas, NV

NAME Annual Meeting

10/16-20, 2026
Kansas City, MS
