

After 26 years, DNA leads cops to suspect in woman's slaying

Cold case murder arrest

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A 26-year-old cloud of suspicion over Steven Strom lifted this week as Woods Cross police arrested another man in the 1980 strangling of his wife, Karin Strom.

A friend woke Strom early Thursday to tell him that DNA tests linked a former co-worker of his to the crime scene and he was no longer a suspect.

"I called them back to make sure I wasn't dreaming," said Strom, who was once charged with his wife's murder.

Earlier this week, a DNA match came back linking 56-year-old Edward Owens to the DNA evidence found under Karin Strom's fingernails, said Woods Cross police Sgt. Brad Benson

Owens was arrested Wednesday and booked into Davis County jail.

"We found our guy," Benson said Thursday.

But questions remain, including the motive for the killing.

Steven Strom found his wife's partially clothed body in the couple's bedroom in June 1980. There was no sign of a home break-in.

The husband became investigators' prime suspect and had remained such until the recent DNA testing.

He was charged with the crime in 1980, but that case was dismissed due to lack of evidence.

Benson reopened the case last year, with the urging of Karin Strom's sister, and submitted DNA samples of Steven Strom and two other men to be compared to evidence collected at the crime scene.

DNA testing did not exist 26 years ago, and Benson had read about recent success that Salt Lake City police have had in solving old cases using a local lab.

Owens and Steven Strom worked as machinists at the same plant, E Solutions, in Davis County.

Strom said he drove Owens to the mountains with their wives over Easter Weekend in 1980 but did not otherwise recall spending time with him outside the workplace.

Steven Strom said he had suspected Owens of the killing because witnesses saw scratches on his hands the day after the killing and because of his demeanor.

Owens declined to make a statement to police and will be arraigned today, Benson said. Benson said he moved Owens to the top of the list to be tested in January when the man told Benson he had consulted with an attorney and declined to be interviewed. "It sent a red flag up," Benson said.

Owens' criminal history consists of convictions for three class B misdemeanors - sex solicitation, disorderly conduct and carrying a loaded firearm in a vehicle, according to a computer search of Utah's district courts.

The firearm case was a wildlife violation committed in Tooele County in October 1988, for which Owens paid a \$60 fine.

In September 1993, Salt Lake City police arrested Owens for sex solicitation. He pleaded guilty and completed a six-month probation, which included paying a \$150 fine and completing an educational class.

In July 1999, Salt Lake City police again arrested Owens for sex solicitation, as well as disorderly conduct.

As part of a plea deal, Owens pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct and the sex charge was dismissed. He completed a 12-month probation, which included payment of a \$250 fine.

Colleen Saltzgiver, of Colorado, helped motivate Benson to look into her sister's unsolved killing during a trip to Utah last year. She said she was happy to hear of the arrest. But with no motive, she said, she still did not feel a sense of closure. "I feel good," Saltzgiver said. "It's not so much closure yet. I still want to know why."

Steven Strom, who lives in California, said he plans to come to Utah for Owens' trial.

When he first heard police had reopened the case, he said, he thought they "were just trying to hang me again."

Stopping at times to weep during a telephone conversation Thursday, Strom said he was thankful for friends who supported him - and for the detective who reopened the case. "I appreciate Mr. Benson's efforts, and I will thank him personally when I see him," Strom said. "I've been telling them they were wrong for 27 years."

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