

Local News

# 36-year-old cold case still haunts Lancaster, Cheektowaga

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LANCASTER, N.Y. -- It was Halloween night.

James Adamski dressed up and went to a party at a Cheektowaga bar.

Afterward, he started walking home from the old 5 and 23 along Transit Road.

According to police, Adamski – a Depew high school senior – may have tried to hitchhike the two miles back to his house.

He never came home.

"This case started in October as a missing person case out of Cheektowaga," said Thomas Fowler. "And it really wasn't until it was discovered here that we got heavily involved in it."

Fowler was Lancaster's police chief then, a position he held for more than 20 years.

Snow and ice were falling the day after Christmas of 1982 when two hunters realized they'd found a body in shallow grave covered with twigs and leaves. They had stumbled upon James Adamski's body about five miles from where he was last seen, now in Fowler's jurisdiction.

The grave was off Ransom Road in an undeveloped area where there was nothing but train tracks.

Today, it's part of the Heritage Trail bike path.

"This was straight. There were no curves in it at the time, and the brush and trees were right up the edges where one could walk or drive," Fowler explained, walking the path with News 4's Erica Brecher. "And it was just off here a little bit in a depression, where there was actually a depression that went off this way, oh...maybe about a hundred feet."

There were signs of blunt force trauma, and someone tried to hide Adamski's body.

"The individual who committed this crime or individuals, knew where to go," Erie County District Attorney John Flynn said. "They knew that it was a secluded spot. They knew that this was a place where likely no one would find the body."

There are other details about the condition of the body that Fowler can't share.

"This case had more twists and turns in it than any case I've been on. I mean, it led us in several distinct directions, it led us to a cabbage farm in Elmira near the Elmira prison," Fowler said.

Suspects were interviewed and released. Nearly every lead was ruled out.

But investigators have not given up on solving this case.

Last year in 2017, Flynn and the Lancaster Police Department held a news conference offering reward money for new information.

"It's bothered Lancaster. It's bothered the entire community the last [35 or so] years. So the Lancaster PD along with this office and Crimestoppers got together to announce to reward money," Flynn said. "And we just wanted to get it back out there in the public eye."

"First of all because it was a young man out having fun, the circumstances of his disappearance were awful, and it had quite an impact on his family," Fowler said. "It's hard not to think about the big ones you were not successful solving."

Flynn said it becomes increasingly difficult to solve old cold cases with every year that goes by. Improving forensics is one way to solve the murder, but chances start to drop that the right witness or the killer himself are still around.

"Once 35, 40, 50 years go by, there is a good chance that the individual who committed the crime

becomes deceased," Flynn said.

The Lancaster Police Department now has a detective dedicated to cold cases, which could one day solve the murder of James Adamski. Lancaster's current police chief declined an interview with News 4 for this story.

"Do you have a feeling about who did this?" Brecher asked Fowler.

"I do. Yeah. But we don't have the evidence. At least we didn't have it during my tenure. I know that the cold case Lancaster detectives are actively working but, uh, I believe that they share the same feelings that I have," Fowler said.

News 4 attempted to reach a brother of Adamski's who still lives in the area. He did not return a request to speak with him.

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