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RONNIE HYDE FOUND GUILTY OF 1994 MURDER OF FRED LASTER

State Attorney Melissa Nelson announces that Ronnie Hyde has been found guilty by jury of First-Degree Murder for the 1994 killing of Fred Laster. The Honorable Tatiana Salvador sentenced Hyde to life in Florida State Prison following the verdict.

On June 5, 1994, a detective with the Columbia County Sheriff's Office began a homicide investigation after a dismembered body was found behind a dumpster at a gas station just off Interstate 10 in Columbia County. The remains were the torso of a white male whose hands, legs, and head were severed and missing. Additional evidence found at the scene included a red long-sleeved flannel shirt with blood stains; two knives and decorative non-slip bath tab appliques wrapped in a blood-soaked egg crate-style mattress topper; and orange gloves with stains. A witness at the time observed a charcoal-colored sports car backed up to the dumpster that morning prior to the gas station opening. The leads and case went cold. The identity of the deceased was unknown.

In May 2014, the case was advertised on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children ("NCMEC") website. In September 2015, Daisy Laster — Fred Laster's twin sister — contacted NCMEC based on the advertisement and stated the individual could be Fred Laster, who disappeared from Jacksonville and was last seen June 4-5, 1994. DNA samples were obtained and submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which compared results to the evidence found at the 1994 scene. Forensic results showed that Fred Laster's DNA — along with an unidentified male's DNA — was present on the shirt.

The investigation revealed Hyde was the last person to see and be with Laster, who he met in the mid-1980s and formed a relationship with the Laster family.

Further investigation revealed Hyde's DNA matched the unidentified male's DNA on the flannel shirt and that Hyde owned a charcoal-colored Camaro at the time of the crime. A search warrant issued in 2017 at his Jacksonville Beach home uncovered Hyde owned egg-crate mattress toppers and knives similar to what was found at the dumpster. Additionally, the bathtub still in Hyde's home showed markings of the decorative bath appliques. Given the totality of the evidence, Hyde was arrested.

The case was investigated by the Columbia County Sheriff's Office, Jacksonville Beach Police Department, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and FBI. It was prosecuted by Assistant State Attorneys Alan Mizrahi and Terence Martin.