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2012

During today's Ayla Reynolds search, a 2004 body discovered

The body of a 53-year-old man was found Saturday during a search for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds, but police didn't find any clues that would lead them closer to the 23-month-old girl.

BY **BEN MCCANNA** STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



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WATERVILLE – The body of man missing since 2004 was found Saturday during a search for Ayla Reynolds, but searchers did not find any clues that would lead them to the toddler.

Volunteer searchers found the skeletal remains of a man whom investigators believe to be Steven C. Brandon, a Waterville resident who has been missing since February 2004. Police do not believe foul play was involved in his death, according to Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



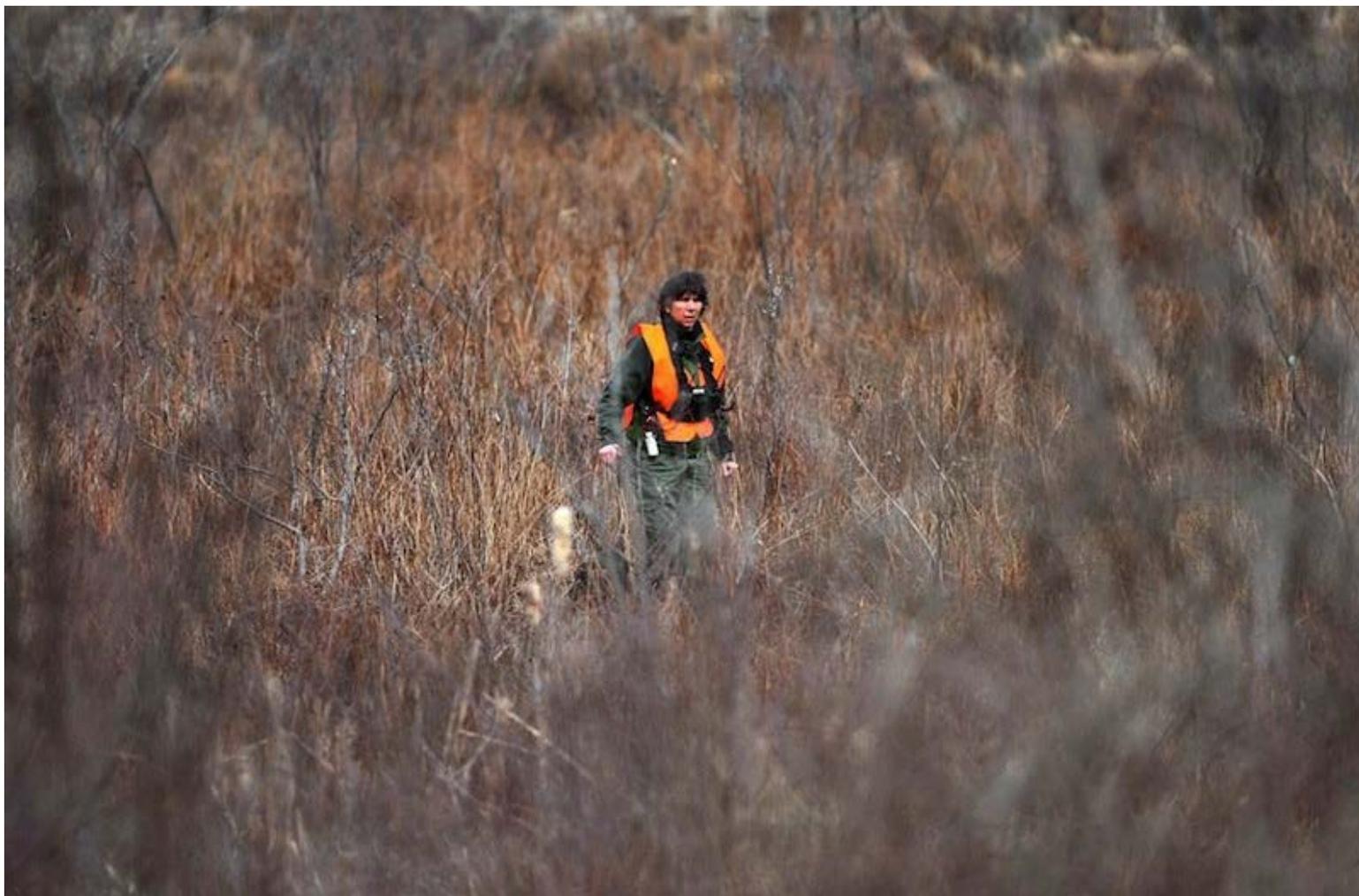
Members of the Maine Search and Rescue Dogs search an area along the side of Heath Court in Oakland for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Saturday, March 24, 2012. Authorities have renewed the search for Reynolds in spots that were previously covered in snow. *Michael G. Seamans / Staff Photographer*



Members of the Maine Search and Rescue Dogs search an area next to Heath Court in Oakland for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Saturday, March 24, 2012 for Ayla Reynolds. Authorities have renewed the search for Reynolds in spots that were previously covered in snow. *Michael G. Seamans / Staff Photographer*



Missing toddler Ayla Reynolds, who vanished Dec. 16 in Waterville and hasn't been seen since.



Members of the Maine Search and Rescue Dogs search an area along the side of Heath Court in Oakland for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Saturday, March 24, 2012. Authorities have renewed the search for Reynolds in spots that were previously covered in snow. *Michael G. Seamans / Staff Photographer*



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The remains, found by volunteer searchers on the banks of Messalonskee Stream, will be sent to the state Medical Examiner's Office to confirm the identity and cause of death.

At a news conference Saturday afternoon, McCausland said investigators have received 988 tips in the Ayla Reynolds case, which is in its fourth month. He added that state police, Waterville police and the warden service have spent more than \$100,000 in overtime related to finding Ayla.

“That gives you an idea of the commitment that has taken place over the past three months, at least financially,” he said.

McCausland also said that communication with the three adults who were in the home the night before Ayla was reported missing has “basically stopped.” Those adults are Ayla's father, Justin DiPietro; DiPietro's girlfriend, Courtney Roberts, of Portland; and his sister, Elisha DiPietro.

“As I have stated all along, we believe those three individuals inside that home that night know things that they haven’t told us, and that is frustrating,” he said. “ But we continue on, we continue to make progress and the work will not stop.”

Asked why communication has stopped, McCausland said, “I guess you’ll have to ask them why the communication has stopped.”

Justin DiPietro couldn’t be reached for comment Saturday.

Steve Bourget, the Augusta lawyer representing Elisha DiPietro and Ayla’s grandmother Phoebe DiPietro, agreed that communication has stopped between his two clients and investigators, but they remain cooperative, he said.

“As far as Elisha and Phoebe are concerned, police have not asked us any questions,” Bourget said. “Anything we can do to help, we will wholeheartedly help, but they have not asked for any help,” Bourget said.

Unseasonably warm weather this winter and spring and the early disappearance of the winter’s snow enabled about 100 searchers, including members of the Maine Warden Service, Maine State Police, the Kennebec County Emergency Management Agency and local fire departments, volunteers with the Maine Association of Search and Rescue and cadaver dogs to search Saturday, said Lt. Kevin Adam of the warden service.

“Typically we wouldn’t be able to search in March this early,” Adam said. “It’s great searching conditions out there. It’s mostly dry. There are no leaves, so you can see a long way. Good scenting conditions (for the dogs) – it’s not real hot, not real cold.”

The search areas included parts of Waterville, Oakland, Sidney, Norridgewock and Fairfield. Adam said searches in Waterville were done to retrace areas that weren’t thoroughly investigated in December, shortly after Ayla was reported missing from her home on Violette Avenue.

In Oakland, the search of First Park, an industrial park off Kennedy Memorial Drive, was meant to expand the areas that have been covered. Searches in other towns were in isolated areas based on higher-priority tips received by state police.

Adam said more ground searches are planned for the coming weeks, as well as water searches by dive teams.

McCausland also encouraged landowners in Kennebec County and the surrounding area to search their property for any signs of the missing girl, who turns 2 on April 4.

“If they’re in the backyards, or back 40 ... and they think they see something that might have some connection to this case, we obviously want to hear from them, and it doesn’t take much to break this case wide open,” he said.

He said the invitation extends to all Maine residents, “But obviously Kennebec County is a pretty wide swath from Waterville.”

Police are treating the girl’s disappearance as a crime, but no one has been charged.

Police confirmed weeks ago that Ayla’s blood was found in the partially finished basement that DiPietro uses as his bedroom, but wouldn’t say how much. Police won’t confirm a report on answersforayla.com, a blog maintained by Ayla’s maternal family, that investigators have told them more than a “cup full” of blood was discovered.

On Friday, the blog also released news of Saturday’s planned search about 12 hours before the search was announced by McCausland.

Morning Sentinel Staff Writer Ben McCanna can be reached at 861-9239 or at:

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