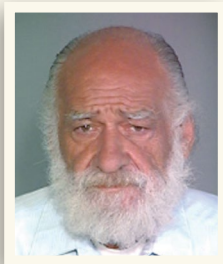


## COVER STORY

# Solved,

## 34 years later

BCI-led cold-case team that investigated brutal attacks in northeast Ohio unearths truth in Arizona grave



Akron Beacon Journal file photo

**W**hen he moved to Yuma, Arizona, Thomas Collier Jordan probably took comfort in knowing that Mexico was less than 10 miles away. If police came sniffing around, he could hightail it across the border.

As he grew further into old age and death neared, he probably took comfort in knowing that his black secrets would be buried with him under the sands of the Sonoran Desert.

Whatever his twisted thoughts, the truth finally caught up with him.

Thanks to the persistence and teamwork of the Hudson and Cuyahoga Falls police departments and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Jordan has been revealed in death to be the monster he was in life.

Specifically, he has been identified as the man who on Aug. 10, 1987, brutally



To watch a video about this case, scan the QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/4r6pdt3s>

Our cover story looks at two cold cases from northeastern Ohio that were recently solved when investigators exhumed Thomas Collier Jordan's body in Arizona and matched his DNA to DNA collected from his female victims 37 years earlier.

It's an exceptional piece of police work that highlights not only the power of collaboration between BCI and local law enforcement, but also the seemingly boundless potential of technology to solve crimes.

Back in 1987, when Michelle Puett-Howard was raped in Cuyahoga Falls and Janice Christensen was raped and killed in Hudson a few months later, DNA technology was still in its early days. Try as they might, forensic scientists were unable to develop full DNA profiles from the biological evidence collected. And they couldn't be certain they'd ever be able to. But the evidence was carefully preserved and safely stored in hopes that the day might come.

Forensic DNA technology has advanced exponentially since that time. For context, it was just a few years after the northeast Ohio attacks, in 1990, that researchers began the Human Genome Project and the FBI launched a pilot project that would eventually become the Combined DNA Index System, or CODIS.

Ultimately, it was because of CODIS and increasingly sophisticated DNA technology that BCI's Cold Case Unit and the Hudson and Cuyahoga Falls police were able to identify Jordan.

As remarkable as this investigation is, cases like it are becoming increasingly common. And that's perhaps the most remarkable thing of all. Back in the late 1980s, who could have imagined a day when law enforcement would be able to collect the tiniest amounts of DNA, develop it into an identifiable genetic profile, and then match that profile to the profile of a known offender in a nationwide DNA database?

In years to come, I think we'll look back with the same degree of wonder on the impact of NIBIN, the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network.



NIBIN, of course, is a ballistics imaging system designed to compare cartridge cases from different crime scenes and generate matches.

It isn't new. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) launched it in 1997, but for all its promise, the system faced significant growing pains.

There were a lot of reasons for that. For starters, early adopters complained that the system produced poor-quality images. (Images are now created in three dimensions, not two.) But there were other factors too, including cost, staffing, training and management hiccups at the federal level.

Fast forward to 2024, and NIBIN is universally recognized as an essential tool — along with eTrace — in the fight to take serial shooters off the streets. Because NIBIN is essentially a massive archive of ballistic fingerprints, its usefulness in connecting seemingly unrelated crimes in Ohio and across the nation will constantly increase as more and more agencies use the system.

In fact, NIBIN's full potential won't be realized until all law enforcement agencies make it their policy to quickly enter all recovered cartridge cases into the system AND immediately follow up on leads generated by the system.

That's why my office added five more NIBIN imaging stations to BCI labs around the state last year and hired additional criminal intelligence analysts to help agencies pursue NIBIN leads. And in a further step to target gun crime, I asked BCI to expand DNA testing on the firearms and cartridge cases that agencies submitted. The impact of those steps is the subject of another story in this edition of On The Job.

We still have a ways to go before all agencies are fully using NIBIN. But when that day comes, and as NIBIN continues to evolve, law enforcement will more quickly, and with increasing frequency, track down and hold accountable the relatively small number of serial shooters who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent crime on our streets.

That day can't come soon enough. It's time everybody got onboard.

Yours,

Dave Yost  
Ohio Attorney General



“Jamieson was not just an officer; he was a guardian of our community, a beacon of hope and a symbol of strength.”

Police Chief  
Dorothy "Annie" Todd

## Cleveland officer who was killed remembered for repeated heroism

In April, Cleveland Police Officer Jamieson Ritter and his partner saved a man who had jumped into the Cuyahoga River. A month later, they saved a man who had been shot multiple times by an unknown assailant.

In June, the Cleveland Police Foundation honored their heroism by naming them Patrol Officers of the Month.

Ritter's promising young career would be ended much too soon only weeks later, early on the morning of July 4. He and several other officers went to a house in the Hough neighborhood to serve an arrest warrant on a man suspected of stealing a gun from his grandmother and shooting her in the face.

When officers arrived, the suspect, De'Lawnte Hardy, attempted to flee by bike, then fired four shots before officers subdued him. One shot hit Ritter, who was rushed to University Hospitals, where he was pronounced dead. He was 27.

The grandmother, Beatrice Potter of Garfield Heights, died later that same day; she had been on life support since being shot on June 29. Hardy is facing aggravated murder charges in both deaths.

Officer Ritter grew up and went to school in suburban Rochester, New York. He was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Syracuse University and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army National Guard when he graduated in 2019. He joined the Cleveland Division of Police in November 2020 and was assigned to the city's Third District.

In 2022, he was deployed to Syria with his Ohio Army National Guard unit, the 134th Field Artillery Regiment, and returned to work the next year with the Cleveland Police.

Police Chief Dorothy "Annie" Todd said Ritter grew up with a profound desire to serve his country and his community.

“His compassion for those in need and his relentless pursuit of justice were evident in every action he took,” she said. “Jamieson was not just an officer; he was a guardian of our community, a beacon of hope and a symbol of strength.”

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost called Ritter a “selfless hero” and noted the tragic irony of his dying on July 4: “The loss of an officer on a day when we celebrate the many freedoms of our country is a cruel reminder of the price paid by those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to keep our communities safe.”

Officer Ritter is survived by his parents, three siblings and numerous members of his extended family.

He was the second Ohio peace officer to be shot and killed in the line of duty this year. Less than two months before Ritter's death, in the neighboring suburb of Euclid, first-year Police Officer Jacob Derbin was ambushed on May 11 while responding to a domestic-violence call. The 24-year-old shooter, Deshawn Anthony Vaughn, was found dead the next day in Shaker Heights following a standoff with police.

## LETS Law Enforcement Training Symposium

Act now! LETS registration deadline is Sept. 23

The annual statewide law enforcement conference presented by the Attorney General's Office has been carefully reimagined this year to deliver even more immediate and practical benefits for the Ohio peace officers who attend.

Now known as the Law Enforcement Training Symposium — LETS for short — the conference will take place Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at Kalahari Resorts & Conventions in Sandusky. (A Job & Career Fair will be held Sept. 29.)

Here's the thing, though: If you haven't already registered, time is running out fast. The deadline is Sept. 23.

The Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy has overhauled the 2024 gathering to align with the vision laid out earlier this year by Attorney General Dave Yost's Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Future of Police Training. Consequently, the LETS lineup reflects Yost's efforts to advance the quality and comprehensiveness of training across the full arc of an officer's career.

### Some highlights:

- The eight mandatory hours of 2024 continuing professional training (CPT) can be completed during the symposium. In addition, CPT credit is pending for all symposium workshops.
- A compressed course in Virtual Reality Immersion — the next big thing in law enforcement training — will prepare and certify officers to be VR instructors.
- A two-part workshop on firearms- and range-safety procedures will allow officers to be certified to administer and score OPOTA requalifications as a Qualification Officer.
- A four-part workshop for patrol supervisors will provide baseline tactical training in managing active-threat situations.
- A School Commander Conference will include a demonstration of the OPOTA Portal and discuss recent updates to the Peace Officer Basic Training curriculum. The workshop satisfies the Ohio Administrative Code requirement for commanders.

You can register for the symposium on or before Sept. 23 at <https://ohioattorneygeneral.regfox.com/LETS>. Questions about the conference should be directed to OPOTA Project Coordinator Susan Boggs at [Susan.Boggs@OhioAGO.gov](mailto:Susan.Boggs@OhioAGO.gov) or 740-845-2353.



ON THE JOB  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE

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Graphic Designer: Diana Holbrook

To offer story ideas, contact Editor Tom Rinderle at 614-644-5397 or [Thomas.Rinderle@OhioAGO.gov](mailto:Thomas.Rinderle@OhioAGO.gov).

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**2003**

Jordan arrives in Yuma

**2009**

Jordan dies under hospice care at age 83 and is buried in Pioneer Cemetery

**April 2024**

BCI agents travel to Yuma to exhume Jordan's body and collect DNA

Yuma

Arizona

**2020**  
Hudson detectives, citing advances in DNA technology, turn to BCI's newly formed Cold Case Unit for help in the Christensen case

**2022**  
Michelle Puett-Howard evidence is resubmitted to BCI and retested, yielding a full DNA profile. The profile matches to Thomas Collier Jordan in CODIS.

BCI Richfield

Geauga

Summit

Hudson Township

Cuyahoga Falls

**1976**

Thomas Collier Jordan is convicted of rape, stabbing and burglary in Geauga County and imprisoned until 1985

**May 25, 1987**

Michelle Puett-Howard is raped at a metropark in Cuyahoga Falls

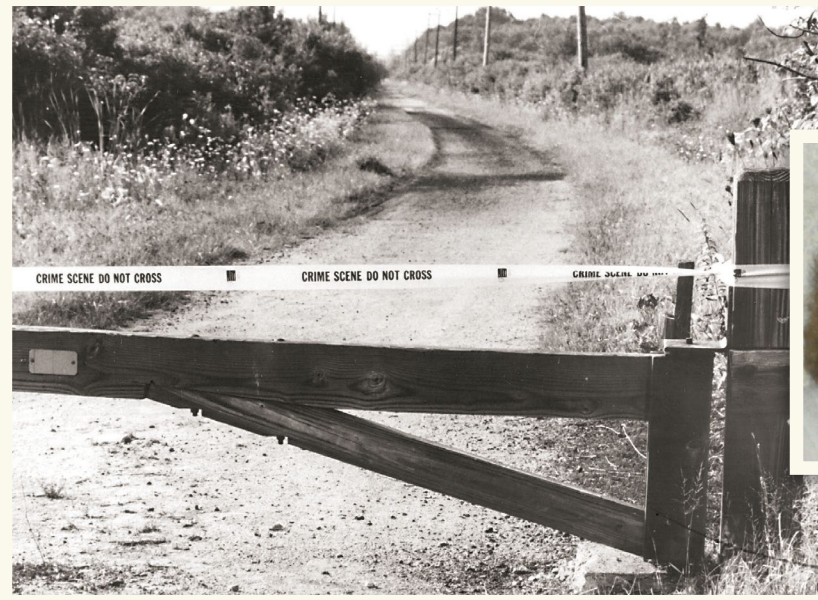
**Aug. 10, 1987**

Janice Christensen is raped and fatally stabbed while jogging on a hike-and-bike trail in Hudson Township

Ohio

BCI main campus

Madison



Continued from Page 1

raped and fatally stabbed 30-year-old Janice Christensen on a hike-and-bike trail in Hudson Township. Christensen had gone for a morning run and opted to keep her dog, Wolf, at home. Her husband, Ken, and Wolf found her body the next day.

Jordan also has been identified as the man who three months earlier — on May 25, 1987 — raped 17-year-old Michelle Puett-Howard at a Metropark in Cuyahoga Falls. The teen escaped with her life when she fought back and fled to the parking lot, where a police officer was ticketing her car.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, Hudson Police Chief Perry Tabak and Cuyahoga Falls Police Chief Christopher Norfolk recently announced the finding, which allowed authorities to close the book on the 37-year-old cold cases.

Although police recognized similarities in the two cases, evidence conclusively connecting them proved elusive.

“The dedicated investigators in these cases were passionate about pursuing justice,” Yost said. “Their determination never wavered. When the technology was up to the task, they pounced.”

At the time of the crimes, the DNA revolution in crime-solving was still in its infancy. It was just the year before, in 1986, that DNA fingerprinting was first used in a police

forensic test, in Leicestershire, England. And it would be several more years before CODIS, the FBI's Combined DNA Index System, was introduced as a pilot project, and more than a decade before CODIS became operational.

In both cases, biological evidence had been obtained, but forensic scientists were unable to develop usable DNA profiles at the time. The cases eventually went cold but weren't forgotten.

In 2020, Hudson detectives, buoyed by an arrest made in a decades-old cold case in neighboring Cuyahoga Falls, realized that advances in DNA technology might yield fresh insights into the Christensen homicide. So they turned to BCI's newly formed Cold Case Unit for help.

Just months before the Hudson PD came knocking, Attorney General Yost had directed BCI to create a team dedicated full-time to re-examining cold cases involving homicide and/or sexual assault. Previously, such cases were worked as time permitted, losing priority to new criminal cases.

Working with Hudson detectives, BCI's Cold Case Unit reviewed similar sexual assaults and homicides throughout northeastern Ohio to determine whether Christensen's killer

was a repeat offender. That's when they hit on the Cuyahoga Falls case of Michelle Puett-Howard.

The similarities between the Puett-Howard and Christensen cases were striking: Both victims were female, attacked on walking trails, bound by shoelaces and sexually assaulted. Also in both cases, a knife was used and the victim's car keys were taken.

The evidence from the Puett-Howard case was resubmitted to BCI's Richfield laboratory in 2022 and retested using the latest DNA technology. Thankfully, the evidence produced a full DNA profile, which was then entered into CODIS, yielding a match to the offender profile of Thomas Collier Jordan.

Jordan was born in Cleveland in 1926 and is believed to have arrived in Yuma around 2003. He died under hospice care in 2009 at age 83. Indigent, he was buried on the county's dime in a barren, out-of-the-way patch of Yuma's Pioneer Cemetery.

To confirm the DNA match, BCI agents traveled to Yuma in April 2024 to exhume his body and collect some of his remains for DNA testing. It matched DNA evidence recovered in both the Puett-Howard and Christensen cases.

In reviewing Jordan's criminal history in Ohio, BCI agents learned that he was a career criminal. He was sentenced to

prison in 1959 in Trumbull County for grand larceny; in 1961 in Cuyahoga County for burglary; in 1972 in Geauga County for malicious entry; and in 1976 in Geauga County for rape, stabbing and burglary — a conviction for which he remained in prison until 1985.

Two years later, he would attack both Puett-Howard and Christensen.

Authorities suspect that Jordan, given his criminal record, likely committed additional sexual assaults during his life. Besides Ohio and Arizona, he is known to have had ties to Nevada, California, Louisiana and Michigan. BCI has issued a bulletin to law enforcement nationwide in hopes that additional cases might be solved.

Special-Agent-In-Charge Roger Davis, who heads BCI's Cold Case Unit, called the case “a perfect example of teamwork and dedication from investigators, analysts and scientists working together to find answers for Michelle and Janice and their family and friends.”

“This multidisciplinary approach brought together myriad perspectives, ideas, expertise and experience, all with the single focus of finding the person responsible for these heinous crimes.”



**In their own words**

The brutal attacks in Cuyahoga Falls and Hudson in 1987 left a lifetime of fear, pain and anger for those most closely affected by the crimes. Meanwhile, law enforcement — though initially stymied — remained confident that no amount of time would prevent them from tracking down the perpetrator.

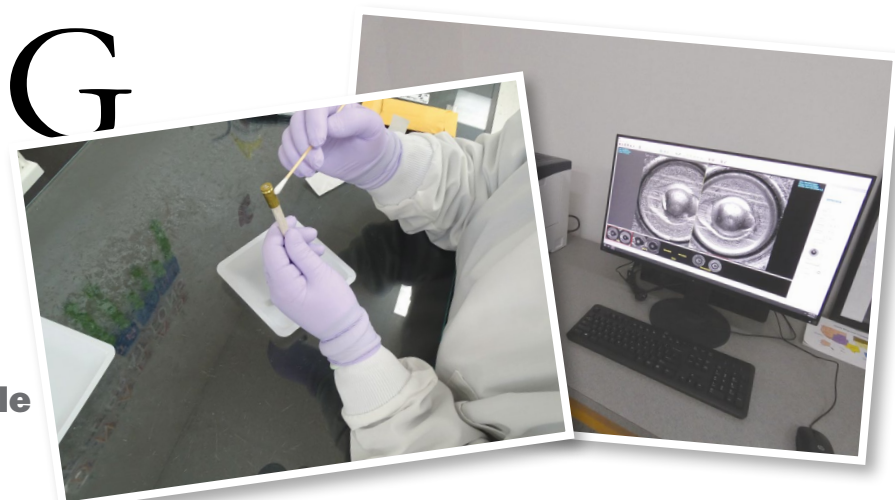
In a video created by the Ohio Attorney General's Office, **Ken Christensen**, who discovered his wife's body the day after she was killed, and **Michelle Puett-Howard (above)**, who was raped but managed to escape, recount the emotions they felt when authorities told them that they had solved the crimes and linked them both to the same man: Thomas Collier Jordan.

Key law enforcement officials also are interviewed, including Special Agent Lindsay Mussell of the BCI Cold Case Unit, Detective Tavis Campbell and Chief Perry Tabak of the Hudson Police Department, Detective Eric Roach and Chief Chris Norfolk of the Cuyahoga Falls Police Department, and Attorney General Dave Yost.

Their remarkable story is available at <https://tinyurl.com/4r6pdt3s>

# ‘DOUBLING DOWN’

The combined use of **NIBIN** and **DNA** analysis at BCI’s labs has added new muscle to the fight against gun crime in Ohio



**F**ourteen months ago, two key decisions by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost took effect that drastically enhanced the ability of Ohio law enforcement to solve gun crimes.

The first decision increased the presence and impact of the National Integrated Ballistic Imaging Network in Ohio. NIBIN, run by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, is an automated digital database that allows for the capture and comparison of fired cartridge cases to solve gun crimes.

The second decision was a policy revision at BCI, which effectively increased the collection and testing of DNA from the guns and cartridge cases submitted to the bureau by law enforcement agencies throughout Ohio.

Previously, NIBIN analysis and DNA testing were rarely used together in analyzing firearms evidence from violent crimes. When coupled with gun tracing, however, they offer the best means to determine whether a gun was used in multiple crimes and to identify who was using it.

“With NIBIN and DNA, we’ve doubled down on our efforts to target the worst of the worst,” Yost said.

In the year since Yost’s two-pronged strategy took effect, nearly 150 additional law enforcement agencies have entered evidence into NIBIN through BCI, resulting in substantially more investigative leads; these were agencies that had never previously entered NIBIN evidence. Meanwhile, BCI’s expanded DNA testing of gun-crime evidence identified 122 repeat offenders and yielded scores of additional investigative leads.

### Expanded NIBIN access

At the direction of AG Yost, BCI last year installed a total of five NIBIN imaging stations at three of its crime laboratories across the state. Labs in Bowling Green, London and Richfield now have two each; previously, only Richfield had a NIBIN station.

The expansion means Ohio law enforcement agencies can scan fired cartridge cases and enter them into NIBIN far more quickly and easily

than before. (The total number of NIBIN stations in Ohio is 16; this includes stations at the Highway Patrol and at metropolitan and county crime labs.)

The goal is to quickly uncover any connections between cartridge cases from one crime scene to those of another, and in turn identify repeat offenders and prevent additional shootings.

NIBIN automatically compares the unique markings on each cartridge case to millions of other cartridge-case images in the database, resulting in a list of possible matches to other gun crimes in Ohio and across the country — a critical step in getting repeat violent criminals off the street.

Because NIBIN’s effectiveness as a crime-fighting tool increases as the size of the database increases, AG Yost has urged all Ohio agencies to enter their fired cartridge cases into the network.

The message hit home.

Jennifer Duvall, who manages the Comparative Sciences Laboratory at BCI, said that from July 2023 through June 2024, 144 agencies that had never previously entered evidence into NIBIN through BCI started doing so. In all, 4,369 fired cartridge cases were submitted by 316 agencies. They generated 771 investigative leads, for an 18% lead rate.


### Broader DNA testing

At the same time that BCI was handling a wave of NIBIN entries, it was increasing the amount of DNA testing performed on the cartridge cases and guns submitted by law enforcement agencies.

Under Yost’s policy change, BCI’s DNA Lab was directed to collect and analyze DNA from two new sources:

- Guns confiscated by law enforcement in weapons-under-disability cases (and to analyze the DNA standard obtained from the suspect).

### Final video in NIBIN training series is ready

 BCI and the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy have posted the third video in a three-part series on the use of NIBIN.

The videos are available through the OPOTA Online portal, under the “Roll Call Refreshers” catalog, at <https://opotaonline.inquisiqlms.com/Default.aspx>

The first video describes policies and best practices for NIBIN and explains how to collect and submit evidence. The second video illustrates how to properly swab firearms for DNA evidence. The final video explains how to effectively use a NIBIN lead in an investigation.

Each course counts for 0.25 credits toward the annual 24-hour continuing professional training (CPT) requirement. The courses can be completed in 15 minutes or less and are fully compatible with mobile devices.

- Gun and cartridge cases recovered in non-violent crimes — for example, in cases in which shots are fired into a house but nobody is hit.

In addition, the lab was directed to swab all guns and fired cartridge cases to preserve biological evidence for possible DNA testing in the future. Obtaining usable DNA profiles from guns has always been a challenge because they are frequently handled by multiple people and have surfaces that inherently complicate the recovery of DNA.

But as DNA processing has continued to evolve, BCI forensic scientists have achieved greater success in developing DNA profiles. (As a further step, BCI is providing training for law enforcement to improve the likelihood that the DNA swabs collected will yield a usable profile.)

DNA Lab Manager Brenda Gerardi said law enforcement agencies submitted more than 1,400 gun-crime cases to BCI for DNA testing from July 2023 through June 2024.

This included more than 900 guns, 60% of which yielded usable DNA profiles.

During those 12 months, BCI entered a total of 653 DNA profiles from gun crimes into CODIS, the FBI’s Combined DNA Index System. Eligible DNA profiles that were developed specifically from guns and cartridge cases, including guns seized in weapons under disability cases, matched profiles in CODIS 52% of the time.

Significantly, the gun crime DNA testing also identified 122 repeat offenders. In some cases, the testing linked additional cases to known offenders. In other cases, the testing linked DNA evidence from one crime scene to DNA found at one or more other crime scenes, where the offender hasn’t been identified by name yet.

In addition to expanding the NIBIN network in Ohio and broadening the scope of DNA testing on firearms evidence, AG Yost’s push to crack down on gun crime included another important component — the hiring of additional BCI analysts and agents.

BCI’s Criminal Intelligence Unit, for example, has added three analysts whose primary focus is helping law enforcement agencies follow up on investigative leads generated by NIBIN.

BCI also plays a key role in Ohio’s Crime Gun Intelligence Centers. Jointly led by the ATF and local police departments, CGICs are multiagency law enforcement hubs focused exclusively on investigating and preventing gun violence in real time. There are more than 60 CGICs nationwide.

With the opening of the Cleveland hub in June, Ohio is now home to three full-scale CGICs.

BCI has an agent and criminal intelligence analyst assigned to each of the CGICs in Columbus and Cleveland, said Dana Forney, the director of BCI’s Criminal Intelligence Unit, and is working with the Cincinnati CGIC to determine what additional support it might need.

### Success stories

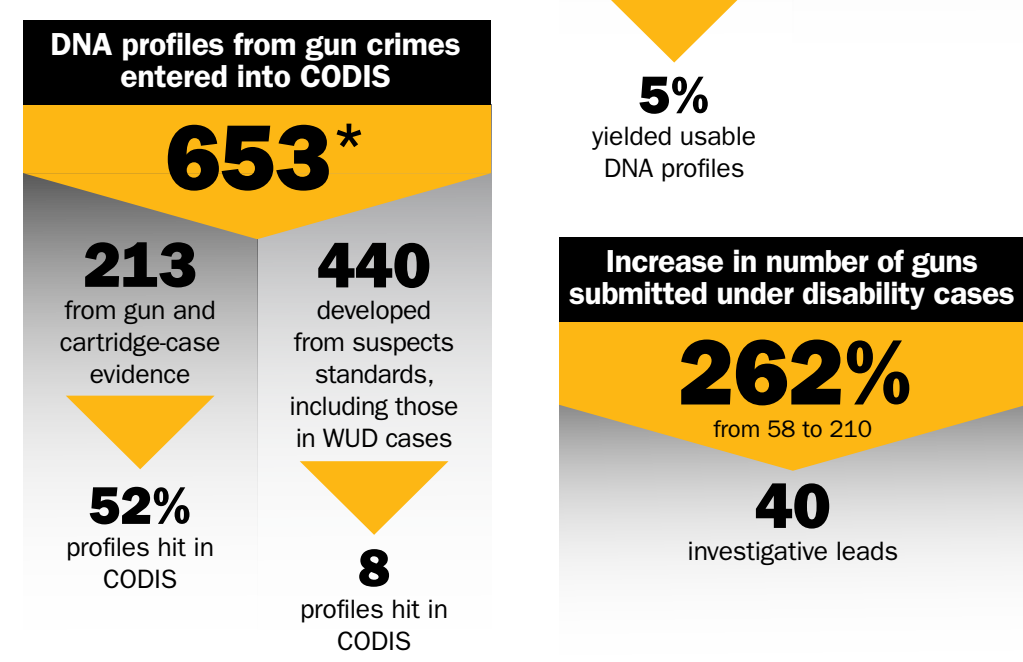
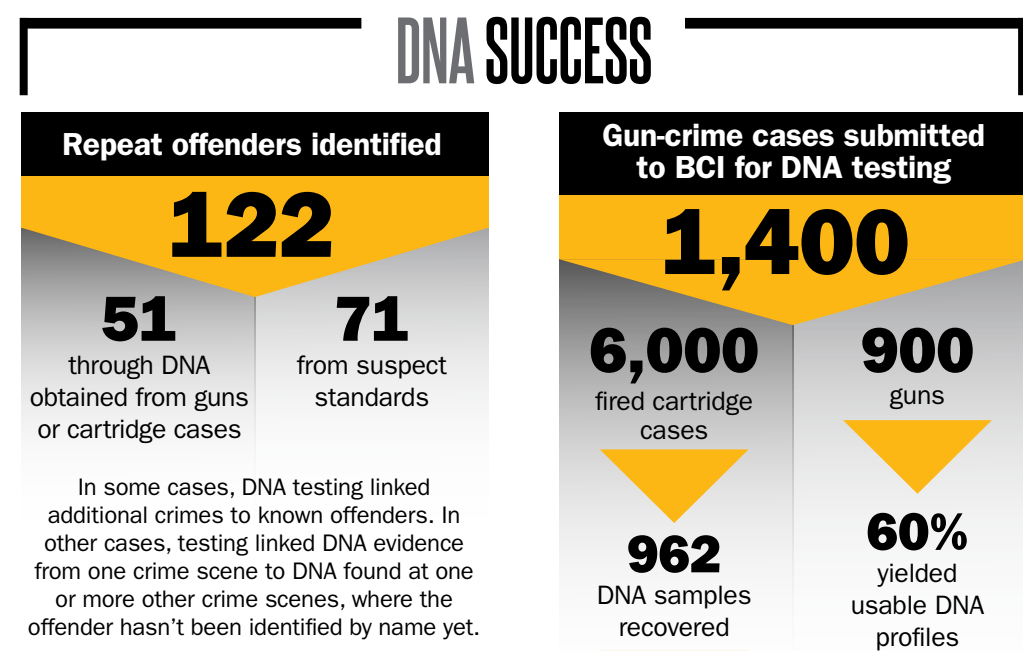
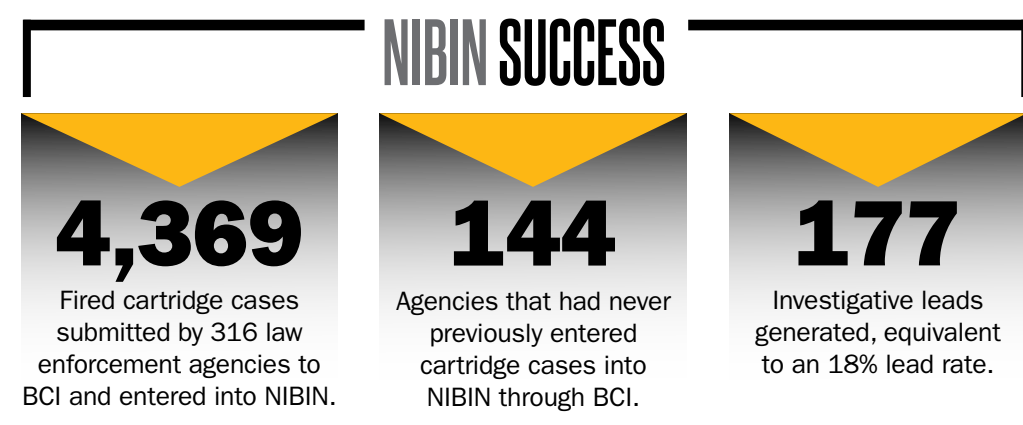
**1** The Warren Police Department responded to a retail store for gunshots fired in the parking lot. Detectives discovered that the gunfire was directed toward a house and had struck a 9-year-old inside. Based on video surveillance from the store, detectives arrested Say’Quan Parks. NIBIN technology at BCI’s Richfield lab linked the cartridge cases recovered from the scene to Parks’ gun. Parks was sentenced to a minimum of 25½ years in prison.

**2** During a pursuit involving Akron police, officers were fired on by two suspects. The vehicle managed to elude officers, but cartridge cases were collected and sent to BCI for NIBIN and DNA testing. DNA testing revealed the identity of a known gang member.

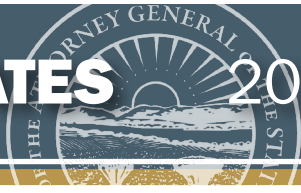
**3** A NIBIN lead linked a homicide under investigation by the Ashtabula County Sheriff’s Office with a firearm recovered by the Ashtabula Police Department. BCI’s Criminal Intelligence Unit assisted the homicide investigation, and a suspect was ultimately charged with a number of offenses, including aggravated murder, aggravated robbery and attempted murder. The suspect is awaiting trial.

## FIGHTING GUN CRIME FROM THE LAB

Under Attorney General Dave Yost’s direction, two key steps to reduce gun crime in Ohio went into effect slightly more than a year ago. The first step expanded the network of NIBIN imaging stations at BCI labs. The second expanded the scope of DNA tests conducted by BCI on firearms evidence. The results — from July 2023 through June 2024 — have been promising:



\* Some evidence samples are not CODIS-eligible due to case circumstances



## Mark Your Calendar

### Looking Ahead



The Attorney General's Office has solidified dates for two major events in 2025. More information will be available in the coming months.

- ✓ Fallen Officers Memorial Ceremony — May 1
- ✓ Two Days in May Conference on Victim Assistance — May 19-20



# ON THE JOB

CRIMINAL JUSTICE UPDATE

**ONE-TWO PUNCH**

**DRILLING DOWN**

**ON GUN CRIME**

BCI's expanded NIBIN access and DNA firearms testing are yielding solid results | 6

**COVER STORY**

**BCI-LED COLD CASE TEAM**

**UNEARTHS TRUTH IN**

**ARIZONA GRAVE | 1**

**FALLEN OFFICER**

**CLEVELAND COP**

**REMEMBERED FOR**

**ACTS OF HEROISM | 3**

