

SEARCHING FOR CLOSURE

FORENSIC DIG PLANNED IN HUNT FOR MISSING KILBRIDE GIRL

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It's been more than half a century since young Marianne Schuett vanished in rural Burlington, shaking her family and the community to its core.

Now, two retired police investigators are putting their skills to use in a renewed search for the 10-year-old Kilbride girl who went missing in 1967 on her way home from school, when she was last seen getting into a man's car.

Linda Gillis Davidson, a former RCMP inspector, and retired Peel Police forensics investigator Gord Collins have been looking into Marianne's case for two years at their own expense as part of their retirement work on cold cases.

Through their research, which has included everything from interviews with the family and retired police to information from a jailhouse informant, they've determined there are two locations near Acton that should be searched for any trace of the beloved



Schuett family photo

From left: A search for Marianne Schuett is set to take place in rural Acton on Sept. 11. Retired investigators Linda Gillis Davidson and Gord Collins have been looking into Marianne's Schuett's case for two years.

youngster — a theory that's backed up by cadaver dogs.

"All six of the canines that were taken through the areas indicated, separately and independently, (that they found) the same odour in the same area," said Gillis Davidson, explaining that the dogs are trained to detect the scent of human decomposition. "What they're telling us is they've found something, and it's human — you find out what it is."

A forensic dig led by Gillis Davidson and Collins, who'll be joined by small groups of volunteers, has been planned for Sept. 11, with the search focusing on

one of the key areas near Highway 25 and 22 Side-road. The duo plan to further explore the second site at a later date.

Marianne's brother, Steve Schuett, says his family has experienced a "roller-coaster ride of emotions" over the years whenever there's a potential new lead in his sister's case.

So needless to say, he's tempering his expectations as the renewed search for Marianne begins.

"Once again, we hope that we can have some closure," he said. "Linda and Gord have been working long and hard on this. Hopefully their efforts will



Wendy Davidson photo

pay off."

While Gillis Davidson said it's unlikely that intact physical remains will be found this many decades later, she and her team — which includes five anthropologists — will be meticulously sifting through the soil, looking for things such as bone fragments.

If that type of evidence isn't found, she said, they'll take core soil samples, with everything being handled, packaged and labelled in the same fashion that would be done at any police investigation. All findings will ultimately be DNA tested.

To date, the only physi-

cal evidence ever located in Marianne's case was a blue sneaker, similar in size and colour to the shoes worn by the young girl, found in the Speyside area near Highway 25 between Milton and Acton.

The person considered to be the prime suspect in the case died by suicide in January 1991, several months after Halton police investigated his possible involvement in Marianne's abduction.

The man had been living in Burlington with his wife and children when Marianne disappeared. Halton police have previously confirmed the suspect was

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- Steve Schuett,
Marianne's brother

jailed in 1972 for the attempted abduction of a 17-year-old girl on Hampton Heath Road in Burlington. The same suspect was also investigated for the alleged sexual assaults of two Ancaster girls, aged three and nine, between 1971 and 1978.

Gillis Davidson said the research she and Collins conducted has placed this suspect within the vicinity of the two sites that will soon be searched.

Information gathered by the duo has also led them to believe this man was involved in several other missing person cases across southern Ontario.

Since the dogs can't discern if the scent they picked up is Marianne's, Gillis Davidson said, there's always a chance that what they discover may belong to another person whose body was placed in the rural area.

It's an outcome that Marianne's brother has prepared himself for.

"At least it would be closure for somebody," he said. "Closure is the only thing we're looking for."

While most volunteer positions for the forensic dig have been filled, those who would like to help in some capacity can contact Gillis Davidson at llgdavidson@gmail.com.

Food and beverage donations for the volunteers are also welcomed.



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