

2023

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

**KANE COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE**



**ROB RUSSELL,
CORONER**

37W699 IL Rt. 38
St. Charles, IL 60175

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OFFICE OF CORONER – “CUSTOS PLACITORUM CORONAE”

The title “coroner” is from the Latin word for crown, “corona”, dating back to the reign of King Richard the Lionheart in 1194

Before they were known as coroners, people from the community were selected to investigate deaths. The Office of Coroner was officially established in England in 1194. Appointed by the crown, coroners were to investigate violent, unexplained deaths, assuring that any property left behind by the deceased was added to the storehouse of the King of England.



Hence the title “coroner”, from the Latin word for crown, “corona”. Coroners were tasked to “keep the pleas of the crown”.

An Eyre, a circuit court held in medieval England by an itinerant judge travelling from county to county, was held in the County of Kent in September of 1194 during the reign of King Richard the Lionheart. The 1194 “Article of Eyre”, the statutory basis for the coroner, stated that, “...in every county of the king’s realm shall be elected three knights and one clerk, to keep the pleas of the crown.” At that time, coroners had to be knights and men of substance. Their appointment depended on a certain property level, wishing to reduce temptation for coroners to follow the sheriff’s existing habit of embezzlement. Coroners were unpaid, the assumption being that if only well-to-do knights were coroners, they

would have no need of further wealth. It was a serious offense to receive a reward (bribe) for their duties. The qualification of coroner was eventually expanded to include, “...to be knights or of the most lawful men of the county.”

Determining the cause of death would also be important in the New World. It is believed that William Penn appointed one of the first coroners in the American colonies in 1682. In “Frame of Government of Pennsylvania” by William Penn, Penn outlined the need for a coroner, “...I, William Penn, do therefore think fit to nominate and appoint such person for judges, treasures, masters of the rolls, sheriffs, justices of the peace, and coroners, as are most fitly qualified for those employments...” At this time, coroners were appointed to lifetime service.

Early American coroners, like their English counterparts, relied mainly on common sense since most did not have a medical background. The only requirement for a coroner was proof that he was not an ex-convict! As the county grew, coroners were elected for all the original 13 colonies. As more new states and territories developed, coroners were elected as county officers, comparable to sheriffs, with whom they often traded places.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CORONER

In 2023, I started my 12th year as coroner. It has been my sincere honor to be able to serve the citizens of Kane County. I am a believer in building a strong team for any entity to be a fully functioning organization. I truly think the following pages support a successful outcome of building a strong team at the Kane County Coroner's Office (KCCO). This team approach has served us well and will continue for as long as I am blessed to be here.

Past accomplishments range from rebuilding integrity and trust in the KCCO, to moving into a new state-of-the-art facility in 2021. The team approach has reclaimed the honorable position this office is required to have. We have solved several cold case inquiries, overcame a mass shooting, as well as a global pandemic. Other agencies are comparable to our results, but none are greater. We do things right and have been

recognized as such by obtaining 100% accreditation status (for the second time) from the International Association of Coroner's and Medical Examiners (IACME). I am proud of my team and the results we have achieved.

Results are important, however, equally vital is the demeanor of how we do things. I can honestly say, my team is the most compassionate and around group that I know. We do what we do, first, for those hurting families. Everything else is important, but it must start from a caring and compassionate approach. Out office surveys (Reference page 8 of this document) definitively convey that the team is just that: caring, compassionate, professional, honorable, and truthful.

Opioid deaths, specifically Fentanyl, continue to plague our communities. I have said, and still believe, that the only way to combat OD deaths is through collaborative efforts. As you read this message, there are several free Naloxone units being distributed throughout Kane County through special events and Naloxone machines that my office has provided. We have been and will continue to partner with the Kane County Health Department. We have also partnered with the Kenneth Young Center to try and create some more synergy with Naloxone distribution. We did see a small decrease in the number of opioid deaths from 2022



to 2023. We hope and pray that this trend continues through these collaborative efforts.

The office of Coroner is a very important institution in the law enforcement arm. Although coroners hire doctors to perform **medical tests and autopsies**, the office itself is not a medical agency. **The Coroner's Office is a law enforcement agency.** Contrary to widespread belief, a coroner need not be a physician. Coroners come from many other professions including police agencies, fire agencies, or the funeral industry. The county coroner is an administrator who oversees the scientific process of determining a death, otherwise known as **medicolegal death investigation**. The coroner guides death investigations and authorizes the appropriate county resources needed to perform the statutory duties.

The primary role of the coroner is to determine the **cause** and **manner** of a death. Coroners, as a law enforcement agency, collaborate with police and fire on scenes, review medical histories from primary care physicians, interview family and friends, and order any additional forensic tests to help answer the following questions surrounding death: **who** (positive ID), **what, where, when,** and **how**. Once these questions have been answered, a final cause and manner of death can be determined. Sometimes, this investigative process can be quick and easy, while other times it is time consuming and difficult. The resources needed for each case are directly proportional to the level of difficulty. Budgeting the resources needed to properly complete out duties is an educated estimate based on industry knowledge and past trends.

It is an honor to serve as your Coroner. If you have any comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at 630-232-3535.

In service,



L. Robert Russell, Kane County Coroner

KANE COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE

Mission:

To provide professional medicolegal death investigation by:

- Determining cause and manner of death
- Identifying decedents
- Notifying next-of-kin
- Protecting decedent's property
- Assisting survivors of the deceased with advocacy group referrals when appropriate

Vision:

To be the leader in providing **compassionate, respectful, and efficient service** to the people we serve in accomplishing our mission statement.

Purpose:

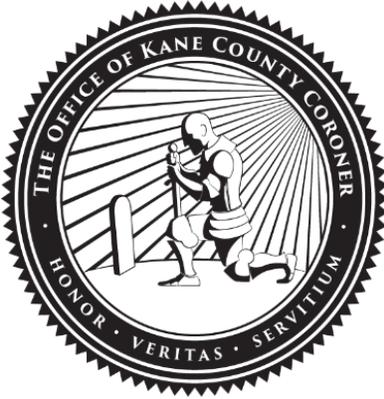
The Kane County Coroner's Office is a statutory law enforcement agency operating **24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year**. It is our goal to maintain full investigative and supportive services, while complying with the law and dealing with rising population growth, increasing caseloads, growing diversity, and complicated lifestyles.

The Coroner's Office investigates all unusual or suspicious deaths in Kane County while striving to maintain a high level of sensitivity to families of victims, assisting with professionalism in the preparation of the deceased for final disposition. The coroner assures that the proper scientific testing is conducted to assist the law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. The Coroner's Office, under Illinois Statute, has the responsibility to inform the public of any and all issues that present a death risk, and also provides educational programs to address preventable deaths.

Illinois State Statutes:

The duties of the coroner are outlined in the **Illinois Code 55 ILCS 5/3-3001-3045** and the state mandates what the coroner does and how the office executes its duties. From swearing in coroner deputies to reporting specific kinds of death to performing mandatory autopsies, the Kane County Coroner's Office dutifully operates within these state-required parameters.

HONOR, VERITAS, SERVITIUM



The Kane County Coroner’s seal communicates the history and integrity of the office. Center on the image is a knight kneeling at a headstone, harkening back to the first coroners who were in service to the crown. Sunrays shining over the scene, which could be from a sunrise OR sunset, representing the coroner’s duties, spanning all hours of all days. Along with “The Office of Kane County Coroner”, the Latin words for **honor, truth, and service**, “Honor, Veritas, Servitium” signify the importance of those values to the Office of Coroner.

ORIGIN OF THE CORONER’S OFFICE IN KANE COUNTY

First elected in 2012, Rob Russell is the 30th person to hold the Office of Coroner, an elected position in Kane County for 187 years. The first coroner was elected on June 4, 1836, at Jim Harrington’s Tavern & Inn, now the site of The Harrington Inn, Geneva, which then served as the County Courthouse. On that day, 180 men gathered to elect officials for the new county: three commissioners, a sheriff, a recorder of deeds, a coroner, and a surveyor.



LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



There are many facets of the law enforcement profession. The most recognizable agencies are police and sheriff’s deputies. The coroner’s office is NOT a police agency; rather **a law enforcement agency that specializes in investigating the cause and manner of death.** Although the coroner’s office has the same powers as the sheriff, we do not perform many of the same duties. The State’s Attorney or Judiciary is not involved in the death investigation process. Our results are final and legally binding at the completion of our investigation.

KANE COUNTY CORONER'S TEAM

Kane County Coroner

L. Robert (Rob) Russell

Full Time Staff

Chief Deputy Coroner

Loren Carrera

Compliance and Special Projects Coordinator

Daniela Gicla

Administrative Assistants

Hollie Burlack

Natalie Hall

Isabel Gonzalez

Deputy Coroners

Lisa Krieghbaum

Derick Hayden

Steve Laker

Gabriela Allison

Carl Herout

Rachel Hall

Kiarni Jones

Becca Ehlert

On-Call Staff

These are contracted, on-call, or volunteer positions that are not full-time employees, thus saving the county / taxpayers resources

Forensic Pathologists

Mitra Kalelkar, M.D.

Board-certified forensic pathologists with over four decades of experience in forensic pathology. She retired from Cook County as the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner and Co-Director of the Residency Training Program. After having served Cook County for over 30 years, Dr. Kalelkar continues to work part-time as a coroner's pathologist dedicated to Kane and DeKalb Counties.

Dr. James Filkins, M.D., J.D.

Physician and attorney, Dr. Filkins is one of the few forensic pathologists who has also litigated cases in court involving wrongful deaths. As a forensic pathologist with the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, he performed several thousand autopsies and has testified in court as an expert witness in forensic pathology over 300 times. He continues to work as a part-time coroner's pathologist for the DuPage, Kane, DeKalb, Kankakee, and Iroquois County Coroner's Offices and as an expert consultant in forensic pathology.

Dr. Marta Helenowski, M.D.

As a licensed physician and surgeon with a subspecialty as a board-certified forensic pathologist, Dr. Helenowski has performed several thousand autopsies during her extensive experience. Dr. Helenowski is currently the Assistant Medical Examiner at the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office and a part-time pathologist for Kane County, and was previously a private autopsy consultant as well as the forensic pathologist for Lake County.

Forensic Odontology

Denise C. Murmann, D.D.S., D-A.B.F.O.

Dr. David Wold, D.D.S.

Forensic Anthropologist

Erin Waxenbaum, Ph.D., D-ABFA

Forensic Entomology

Neal Haskell, Ph.D.

Ophthalmology Pathology

Richard J. Grostern, M.D.

Cold Case Unit

Maureen E. Kelly, J.D., Investigator

Gabriela Allison, Investigator

Toxicology

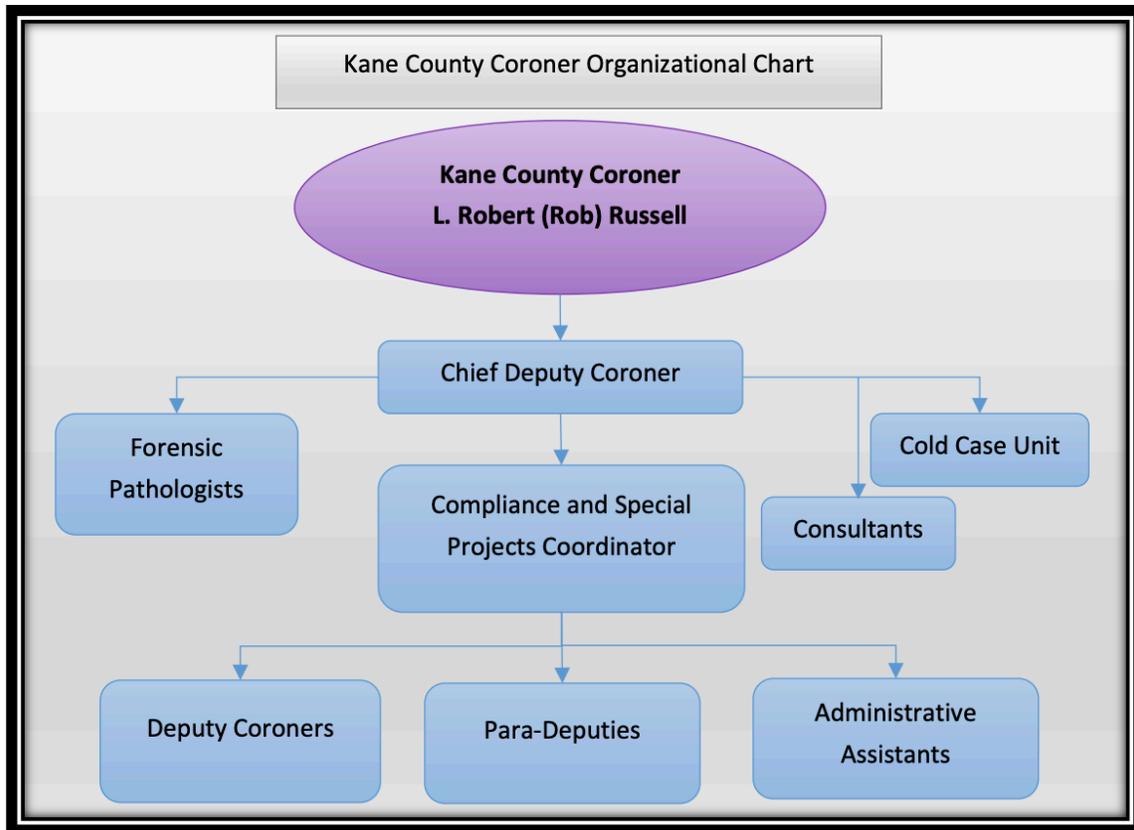
NMS Labs

Histology

Tissue Techniques Pathology Lab

Chaplain

Reverend Tim Perry, President of
Nationwide Chaplain Services



ON DUTY 24/7/365

Deputies continued **rotating 12-hour shifts** in 2023. Previously, all deputies worked 8-hour shifts, 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday. They were called out for after-hours calls as needed. Deputies were frequently called in while off duty to cover calls during evenings, overnights, weekends, and holiday hours. After-hours call outs were inefficient for the office budget, as well as problematic for the deputies' morale. They were never fully considered "off-duty". This unpredictable schedule made it difficult for staff to physically recharge, while properly coping with the difficult subject matter of death investigation.

Because the work of the Kane County Coroner's Office is 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, Coroner Russell generated a schedule that spread out the hours equally amongst the deputies. In essence, all calls are handled within the assigned duty time, with an on-duty deputy 24 hours a day, in 12-hour increments. **A Kane County Coroner's Office Deputy is in the office 24/7/365**, virtually eliminating the need for after-hours calls. Deputies are actually off duty when not scheduled and can better plan their personal time. It is a very rare event when a deputy is called into work while off duty. The rare exception was when all deputies were called in to respond to the February 15, 2019, tragic mass shooting at the Henry Pratt Company in Aurora, where six lives were lost.

THE PROCESS OF A CASE

Understanding Death investigation



The coroner's office is a **law enforcement agency**. Typically, we are called by the police jurisdiction where the body is located, but sometimes other agencies, hospitals, or funeral homes will call. There are two key words in determining a coroner's case, **suspicious** and/or **sudden**. If the death is suspicious and/or sudden, it will most likely be a coroner's case. It is important to point out that under most states, including Illinois, only three people have the authority to finalize a death certificate: a licensed physician, a nurse practitioner, or the county coroner.

Once the Coroner's office is made aware of the death, the assigned investigator begins to ask the important questions: **Who?**

What? Why? When? And How? The absence of answers to those questions, coupled with the level of suspiciousness, guides the investigator's next steps. Some decedents have an extensive, documented medical history. If that is the case, the investigator may be able to contact the decedent's physician and discuss the circumstances of the death. If the physician has no concerns, believes the death is due to the medical issues, and is willing to complete and sign a death certificate, the case is referred to the physician for completion. This type of case is called **Return to Medical (RTM)**. These are almost always **Natural Deaths**. If the physician does not feel comfortable completing the death certificate, it is the responsibility of the coroner's investigator to complete the certificate so that the coroner can sign it. By ordering and reviewing medical records and questioning witnesses in a relatively expedited manner, the case can be solved by the coroner via the investigator. If the death investigation yields all the relevant information needed to answer the important questions, the coroner will review the report and sign the death certificate. This type of case is appropriately called a **Sign Out (SO)**.

The Last, and most complex, type of coroner's case is called a **Sign Out - Unnatural (SOU)**. The SOU case typically requires the most resources to investigate properly. Examples of SOU cases include, but are not limited to, all **Homicides, Accidental Deaths, and Suicides**. The resources for these cases most likely require autopsy, toxicology, specific testing, history, as well as hours, days, weeks, and even months of investigation time.

This is a brief outline of how the process works, but it is important to point out that, **although there are recognizable patterns in certain types of deaths, every case is different**. Cases can morph from one type of case into another and back, and have done so on several occasions.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

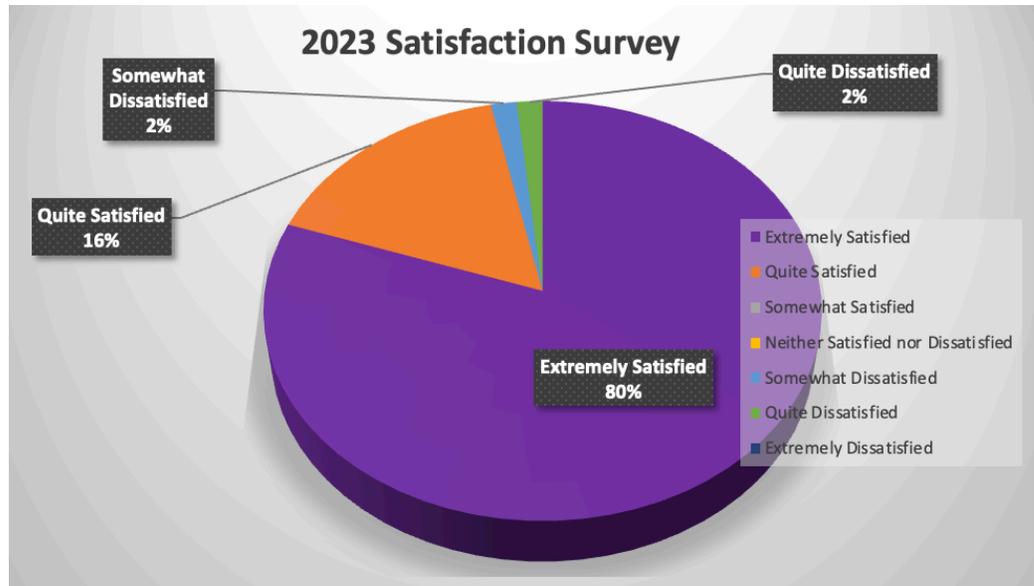
Why did we implement the Satisfaction Survey? To find out from the people we serve how we are doing.

With this satisfaction survey, families have the opportunity to evaluate the professionalism, compassion, and attitude of our employees, to

ask questions, or to voice concerns, with the option of remaining anonymous. The surveys not only represent a snapshot of the office but may also reveal areas for improvement.

We want to always be cognizant that when working with the families of a deceased loved one, it is quite likely one of the worst days of the family's life. We want to do nothing to add to that pain, all the while carrying out the required duties of the investigation. Sadly, there are occasions when the grief of the family is so great that no amount of kindness and caring will ease their immediate pain. On the rare occasion, that pain may be reflected in negative responses on our survey. We are constantly reviewing and assessing all surveys to determine if we can improve. With that in mind, we updated our list of helpful resources to make available to next of kin at the time of their loved one's death, as they work through their loss. With this information, they can reach out for assistance from a variety of local agencies who specialize in bereavement and counselling services.

The Kane County Coroner's Office Satisfaction Survey, consisting of seven questions and a comment section, along with the list of helpful resources in English and Spanish, are sent to families of all Sign Out - Unnatural (SOU) deaths and any Sign Out (SO) deaths where we ran toxicology or performed an autopsy. To better understand SOU and SO, please see page 7.



I was honestly quite impressed with the Coroner that came out. They were very professional + genuinely compassionate. They made a very big difference during an absolutely dreadful time. I am very thankful! Keep up the good work!

THANK YOU FOR DOING WHAT YOU FOLKS DO!

Everyone was helpful and respectful.

FROM THOSE WE SERVE

More Comments from families we served in 2023:

thank you was great - Very Professional from the time he walked in the door, till he called me about my brothers autopsy. I couldn't have asked for a better person to deal with at this time

Every person I talked to was very helpful and explained everything to me step by step I am so thankful for all the help they gave me to get through this very difficult time so I would like to say thank you KANE COUNTY CORONERS

Everybody that attended us went above and beyond our expectations. WE Thank in our time of need.

takes special people to do what you do for a living

When I called back w/ questions the lady assistant was so sweet & patient & acted on my question with a call back quickly. I appreciated that

Thank you!

My family and I appreciate all of your efforts and sympathy.

thank-you's

Caring. Thank you!

I am so thankful to your Dept in regards to my sisters death-

Thank you for questioning the hospital. you did what was right.

your STAFF WAS PROFESSIONAL helpful throughout out the process. Thank you during this difficult time.

NATIONAL NIGHT OUT 2023

Enhancing the Relationship Between the Community and Law Enforcement

The Coroner's Office long-standing participation in "National Night Out" builds on the knowledge that **promoting law enforcement and community partnerships, as well as neighborhood comradery, improves the quality of life, and makes our county safer,** creating a true sense of community.



Moving to the Kane County Judicial Center in St. Charles places the Coroner's Office in the center of the annual Kane County National Night Out festivities. Not only did Coroner Rob Russell and several Deputy Coroners visit with the public, sharing a table full of informational pieces and fun giveaways, but they also gave tours of the Coroner's Office. Of special interest is always the autopsy suite. Community events are a perfect opportunity for the Coroner and Deputy Coroners to engage in valuable conversations with citizens of all ages.

"What do you do at the Coroner's Office?"

Young people often ask this question. This is a great opportunity for them to learn about medicolegal career possibilities. Parents often ask how to be better prepared to answer questions from their children. We offer a variety of educational brochures covering important topics, including suicide prevention, alcohol and drug use, and accident prevention.

"The best way to build a safer community is to know your neighbors and your surroundings. National Night Out triumphs over a culture that isolates us from each other and allows us to rediscover our own communities."

-Former Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson



SOUTH ELGIN & COUNTRYSIDE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT OPEN HOUSE

So often, **Coroner Russell**, the Deputy Coroners, and support staff of the **Kane County Coroner's Office** carry the weight of grief that members of our community experience. Because of this, when the staff is able to get out into the community and bring smiles and joy, we jump at the chance!

Thank you, **South Elgin & Countryside Fire Protection District**, for inviting our staff to join you for the open house which was held on **October 21, 2023**.



Above: Coroner Russell, Deputy Chief Carrera, and several Deputy Coroners pictured with a Coroner's vehicle at the Open House



Above: Coroner Russell speaking with community members at the event
Left: Coroner Russell setting up in preparation for the Open House Event

JULIA THE COMFORT DOG



Meet **Julia**! Julia is a Lutheran Church Charities Comfort Dog who we have brought to the office, on occasion, to thank our staff for the incredible work that they do.

The work of the Coroner's Office is undoubtedly emotionally fatiguing and demanding. Bringing in **Julia the Comfort Dog** was a much-welcomed delight to have in the office to bring joy and support the mental health of our staff.



Thank you to **Julia the Comfort Dog** for visiting the Kane County Coroner's Office, and for your support of law enforcement and the community. It was a pleasure having you!



EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The office had an amazing few weeks spending time with the youth of our community! Coroner Russell and his staff welcomed several classes from West Aurora High School, East Aurora High School, St. Charles East High School, Harper College, Elgin Community College, and the Law Enforcement Youth Academy.



During these visits, students were able to tour the office and learn more about what the Coroner's Office does in our community. We would like to thank all the students for their great questions and for their eagerness to learn about our office!



If any community or educational groups would like to schedule a tour, please reach out to our office!

KANE COUNTY HALLOWEEN COMPETITION

While we know our staff are truly superheroes, dressing up as some of our favorite superheroes was a great way to celebrate Halloween with our friends and families throughout the county.



The Kane County government held their 2nd annual Halloween competition where Kane County Staff and their children were invited for trick-or-treating and to show off their best costumes yet!

Each department and office within Kane County could pick a theme and was to decorate a table.

Best decorated office wins!



OVERDOSE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Coroner Rob Russell partnered with Sydney Johnson, a Chicago Doctoral student, to host support group meeting sessions to support families and loved ones that have lost someone to an overdose. With this innovative idea, Coroner Russell hopes to make an impact to combat the opioid crisis that plagues our community and nation.

(See page 24 for more information on 2023 opioid-related statistics)

Kane County Creates Bereavement Group for People Grieving an Overdose Death

Kane County Connects Staff 9/11/2023 8:00AM

The number of drug-related overdose deaths in the nation is staggering. In Kane County alone, 78 lives were lost in 2022.

Navigating grief for survivors of loved ones who died from overdose can be isolating, according to Kane County Board Member Anita Lewis who lost two nephews to overdoses. She, along with Kane County Coroner Rob Russell and Chicago doctoral student Sydney Johnson, have set out to establish the bereavement therapy program exclusively for individuals who lost someone they loved to a drug related overdose.

"Society creates a stigma about an overdose death, blaming the victim or shaming the relatives for not being a better parent," said Lewis. "It can make grieving difficult for survivors to understand their loss if others are judging you because they don't understand addiction."

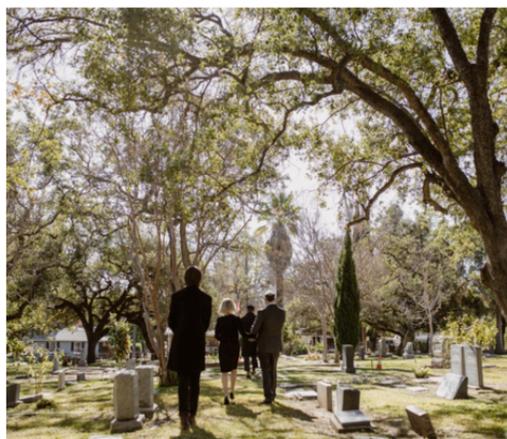
Johnson envisions an eight-session program designed to provide support and healing, for people grieving an overdose death.

"Unlike an open expression group, this program is structured and facilitated by professionals to ensure a safe and supportive environment for participants," said Johnson.

The bereavement group is a step towards addressing the devastating impact of the opioid crisis on families and communities.

"I'm tired of watching people from all walks of life die because of opioids and overdoses," said Russell. We've tried a lot of different things, with some success, and this idea of creating an overdose death specific group to help loved ones is thinking outside the box and may really make an impact."

The grief sessions will be free to participants and organizers are aiming to begin the first group in the fall of 2023 at the Kane County Coroner's Office.



Kane County Creates Bereavement Group for People Grieving an Overdose Death

Source:

www.kanecountyconnects.com

1978 BATAVIA SKULL COLD CASE

In 1978, the residents of a Batavia home discovered human skeletal remains while remodeling their home. Batavia Police Department sent the remains to the anthropology department at Northern Illinois University for further examination where it was determined that the remains belonged to a female in her twenties at her time of death. Despite investigative efforts, the case went cold.

Batavia Police Department and the Kane County Coroner's Office Team with Othram to Identify 1978 Jane Doe

Nearly five decades later, investigators continue their efforts to identify partial skeletal remains found behind a wall in a Batavia, Illinois apartment.

WESTERN SUBURBS

New efforts underway to solve 45-year-old mystery in Kane County

by: [Shannon Halligan](#)
Posted: Dec 26, 2023 / 09:33 PM CST
Updated: Dec 26, 2023 / 09:35 PM CST

CHICAGO'S VERY OWN
WGN9

KANE COUNTY

Kane County officials seek help in ID'ing skull connected to 1978 cold case

Published December 26, 2023 • Updated on December 26, 2023 at 8:20 pm

In 2023, the Kane County Coroner's Office and the Batavia Police Department decided to partner with Othram, a lab that specializes in DNA testing and genetic genealogy, in hopes of identifying the Jane Doe from the 1978 Batavia home.

LOCAL NEWS

Investigators hope to identify bones found Chicago area home 45 years ago

By Matthew Cramer
December 26, 2023 / 10:39 PM CST / CBS Chicago

In late December 2023, Coroner Russell and this case were featured on several news outlets in hopes of crowdfunding the necessary testing from Othram to make progress on the case. Coroner Russell and the Kane County Coroner's Office will be eagerly awaiting to share update as this case progresses in 2024.

Skull found in Batavia could be ID'd with public's help, coroner says

By FOX 32 Digital Staff | Published December 26, 2023 2:55pm CST | Batavia | FOX 32 Chicago |

FOX 32

CHICAGO SUN★TIMES

Kane County coroner, Batavia police seek public's help solving 45-year-old mystery

Authorities hope the public can help identify human remains found in a home that was being remodeled in 1978.
By The Daily Herald | Dec 26, 2023, 10:25pm CDT

A LIFE SAVING PARTNERSHIP

Collaboration saves lives! The Kane County Coroner's Office works with families, hospitals, law enforcement, funeral homes, and Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network to enable deceased individuals to donate lifesaving organs to patients awaiting transplants.



Donors save the lives of patients awaiting heart, lung, kidney, and liver transplants. Some donors can also donate tissues, which are used to help burn victims heal, athletes, or military personnel recover from injuries, and other men, women, and children walk or see again. Gift of Hope is one of 57 federally designated organ procurement organizations that make up our nation's donation system. Its teams coordinate organ and tissue donation in northern Illinois and

western Indiana, working with the families of donors, coroners, funeral homes, law enforcement, hospitals, and transplant programs. Following donations, Gift of Hope provides outcome information and ongoing support for the donor's families.

Since 1987, through Gift of Hope and all those in our region who say yes to organ and tissue donation, the lives of more than 23,000 organ transplant recipients have been saved and hundreds of thousands of lives have been changed through tissue transplants.

Featured on the Gift of Hope website are "**Stories of Hope**," stories of those such as Jermaine, Shawna, Brody, and Don. Those whose legacies live on. Those who, along with their family, said "**YES**" to organ, tissue, and eye donation.

Registering as a donor means that you have documented your wish to save lives when you are gone. It means you can help others walk or see again. It means your family and friends have another way to celebrate your life – as someone who gave the gift of hope to others.



Please take a few minutes today and learn more about donation at giftofhope.org – and register as a donor. This QR code will direct you to the registration page.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND COUNTY INVOLVEMENT

Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths

The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, taskforces, and associations:

Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association (ICMEA)

The ICMEA is a not-for-profit corporation for the purpose of uniting the members of the organization and upgrading the Office of Coroner and professionalizing it through the exchange of ideas and development of educational programs to the end that Coroners will be better equipped to discharge their statutory duties and thereby better serve the public to which their primary responsibility lies.

Coroner Rob Russell is a past President of the ICMEA, serving in 2019.



Illinois Fatality Review Team Advisory Council (FRTAC)

The oversight body for the regional At-Risk Adult Fatality Review Teams (FRTs) is the Illinois FRTAC. The Illinois FRTAC ensures that data, results, findings, and recommendations of the FRTs are used in a timely manner to make any necessary changes to policies, procedures, and State statutes to protect at-risk adults; collaborating with the Illinois Department of Aging to develop any legislation needed to prevent unnecessary deaths of at-risk adults.

Illinois Child Death Review Team

The purpose of Illinois Child Death Review Team is to reduce the number of preventable child deaths in Illinois. When a child dies, the response by the State and community to the death must include an accurate and complete determination of the cause of death, the provision of services to the surviving family members, and the development and implementation of measures to prevent future deaths from similar causes. Multidisciplinary and multi-agency reviews of child deaths assist in developing a greater understanding of the incidence and cause of child deaths, methods for preventing those deaths, and identifying gaps in services to children and families.

Region 2 Adult At-Risk Fatality Review Team

The Region 2 Adult At-Risk Fatality Review Team (FRT) investigates abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of persons 60+ years old, and adults with disabilities aged 18 to 59, living in a domestic setting. As a regional interagency group, the purpose is to assist local agencies in identifying and reviewing suspicious deaths of adult victims of alleged, suspected, or substantiated abuse or neglect in domestic living situations. Findings are then reported to the Illinois Fatality Review Team Advisory Council, who then makes recommendations that may help to improve the investigations of deaths of at-risk adults and increase prosecutions, if appropriate.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND COUNTY INVOLVEMENT

Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths

The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, taskforces, and associations:

Illinois Division International Association for Identification (IDIAI)

The IDIAI is a not-for-profit association that serves as a regional division of the larger International Association for Identification, one of the oldest and largest forensic associations in the world. IDIAI is comprised of forensic scientists, investigators, crime scene investigators, evidence technicians, and others involved in forensic investigation of crime and strives to further the profession of forensic identification and scientific crime detection by promoting research, scientific techniques, and standardization through training and communication.



Kane County Opioid Taskforce

Spearheaded by the Kane County Health Department, this coalition of local leaders, law enforcement agencies, healthcare professionals, treatment center representatives, and advocacy groups meet on an ad hoc basis to discuss opioid-related issues within the county.

Kane County Major Crimes Task Force (KCMCTF)

The KCMCTF provides additional expertise, manpower, and equipment to member agencies involved in a major investigation. Major Crimes can include, but is not limited to, homicide, serial sexual assault, serial arson, major arson and bombing, non-parental kidnapping, complex violent crimes against people, heinous crimes, and complex crime scene processing and evidence collection. The primary administrator or designee or any member agency may request KCMCTF assistance upon the discovery of a qualified incident.

Kane County Fire Investigation Task Force (KCFITF)

The KCFITF develops and implements strategies to investigate and prosecute responsible individuals through mobilizing public and private resources, coordinating responsibilities, and integrating the efforts of agencies, groups, and persons who are involved, or should be involved, in such an organized strategy. The KCFITF works closely with all fire and law enforcement agencies within Kane County. When called to do so, the Task Force assists and/or augments a fire investigation as directed by the Incident Commander at the scene. Each case presented to the State's Attorney's Office since the inception of the KCFITF in the year 2000 has resulted in a successful prosecution.

STATE, REGIONAL, AND COUNTY INVOLVEMENT

Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths

The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, taskforces, and associations:

Kane County Chiefs of Police Association (KCCPA)

As a Law Enforcement Administrator, Coroner Rob Russell is a member of the KCCPA. The KCCPA works to provide continued support for the following Kane County Law Enforcement agencies:

- Kane County Major Crimes Task Force
- Arson Task Force
- Bomb Squad & Bomb Dog
- Auto Theft Task Force
- Kane County Accident Reconstruction Team
- Kane County Honor Guard



Each of these Support Services is available to every police department in the county on a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year basis, providing highly trained, technically proficient tactical officers and specialized equipment to each of our communities; which otherwise are unaffordable to a single community or Police Department.

Kane County DUI Task Force

The DUI Task Force is a local anti-crime program created to enhance public safety by aiding law enforcement agencies in the apprehension of drivers impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs, thereby reducing the threat of DUI-related traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries posed by impaired drivers within Kane County.

Kane County Hoarding Task Force

Founded to create a cohesive, coordinated, and proactive response to self-neglect in Kane County by providing agencies, organizations, and individuals with the tools required to protect vulnerable adults.

Hoarding is a complex disorder that is made up of three connected problems:

- Collecting too many items
- Difficulty getting rid of items
- Problems with organization

These problems can lead to significant amounts of clutter which can severely limit the use of living spaces, pose safety and/or health risks, and result in significant distress and/or impairment in day-to-day living.

2019 – 2023 STATISTICS

A 5-Year Review

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Reported Deaths	3283	4079	3889	3979	3664

Case Types (Refer to Page 7)	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
RTM (Return to Medical)	2881	3579	3368	3441	3183
SO (Sign Out)	158	242	242	265	205
SOU (Sign Out Unnatural)	244	258	279	273	273
TOTAL	3283	4079	3889	3979	3664

Manner of Death	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Natural	3038	3822	3610	3706	3388
Accident	176	193	206	203	209
Suicide	44	42	46	48	38
Homicide	19	16	16	12	16
Could not be Determined	6	6	11	10	13
TOTAL	3283	4079	3889	3979	3664

Method Within SOU	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Other	152	174	175	169	175
Suicide	44	42	46	48	38
Motor Vehicle	31	26	44	44	44
Homicide	19	16	16	12	16
TOTAL	244	258	279	273	273

Organ Procurement	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Organ Referrals	240	176	208	215	228
Tissue Referrals	478	633	691	208	278
Organ Donors	16	11	13	13	13
Tissue Donors	138	62	52	55	63

2019 – 2023 STATISTICS

A 5-Year Review

General Cause within Manner of Death

Accident	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Drug/Alcohol Intoxication	87	93	95	100	104
CO Intoxication	3	2	2	3	2
Chemical/Other Intoxication	0	2	2	0	0
Fall	37	52	43	43	47
Motor Vehicle	31	26	44	44	44
Aspiration	10	5	6	3	2
Asphyxia	1	2	7	3	3
Drowning	3	5	2	1	4
Electrocution	0	0	0	0	2
Exposure	3	5	2	5	1
Industrial	1	0	1	1	1
Surgery / Post-Op	0	4	0	0	2
Exsanguination	0	0	1	0	0
Gunshot Wound	0	0	1	0	0
Train vs. Pedestrian	0	0	0	0	2
Driving Accident	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	176	193	206	203	209

Suicide	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gunshot Wound	17	16	17	14	15
Hanging	17	16	21	22	15
Asphyxia	2	2	2	0	2
Drug/Alcohol Intoxication	5	2	2	3	5
CO Intoxication	1	2	2	1	0
Chemical/Other Ingestion	0	1	1	2	0
Fall from Height	0	2	1	0	1
Pedestrian vs. Train	1	0	0	4	0
Motor Vehicle	0	1	0	0	0
Exsanguination	1	0	0	1	0
TOTAL	44	42	46	48	38

Homicide	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gunshot Wound	17	14	13	8	13
Stabbing	1	1	0	3	3
Assault w/ Blunt Object	1	0	1	1	0
Strangulation	0	1	1	0	0
Asphyxia	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	19	16	16	12	16

2019 – 2023 STATISTICS

A 5-Year Review

Opiates	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Opiate-Related Deaths	55	64	78	78	71
Positive for Opiates	90	97	96	104	154
Deaths Involving Xylazine	0	0	0	0	5
Deaths Involving Bromazolam	0	0	0	0	4

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cases Receiving Investigation	3283	4079	3889	3979	3664
Bodies Transported by KCCO	347	448	409	460	458
External Exams by KCCO	397	454	423	470	458
Partial Autopsies by KCCO	0	0	0	0	0
Full Autopsies by KCCO	254	330	301	342	336
Hospital Autopsies under KCCO Jurisdiction	0	0	0	0	0
Cases with Toxicology Performed	284	354	341	400	371
Unidentified Bodies	0	0	0	0	0
Unclaimed Bodies	9	25	19	21	8
Exhumations by KCCO	0	1	0	0	0
Cremation Permits	2041	2579	2528	2618	2474
FOIA Requests	349	304	407	579	605

Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Kane County Coroner's Office is a public body. As such, it is subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 ILC 140/1, et seq., Under FOIA, members of the public can request and receive records of the Coroner that are kept in the Coroner's ordinary course of business.

Under a separate statute, the Coroner's Office has the authority to charge a fee in exchange for the copying of these records, 55 ILCS 5/4-7001. All fees collected are deposited into a special account in the County Treasury to be used for the purchase of electronic and forensic identification equipment or other, related supplies and operating expenses of the Coroner's Office.

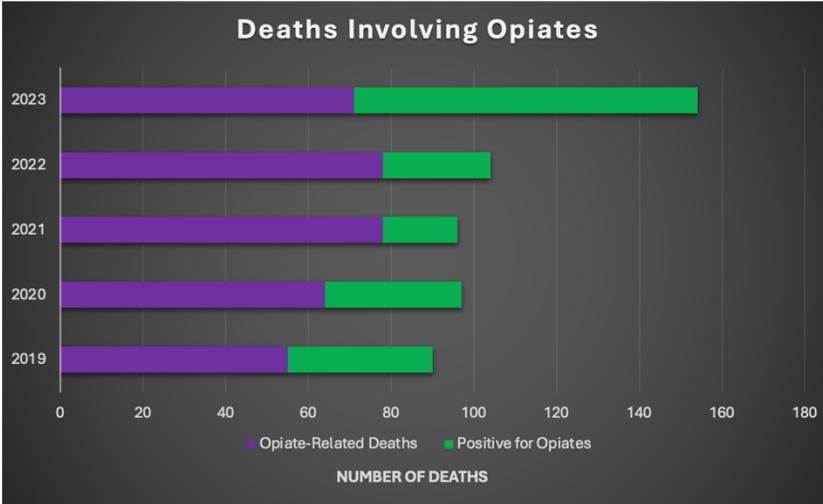
Autopsy Reports: \$50.00
Toxicology Reports: \$25.00

Coroner's Reports: \$25.00

Transcription of Sworn Testimony: \$5.00 per page

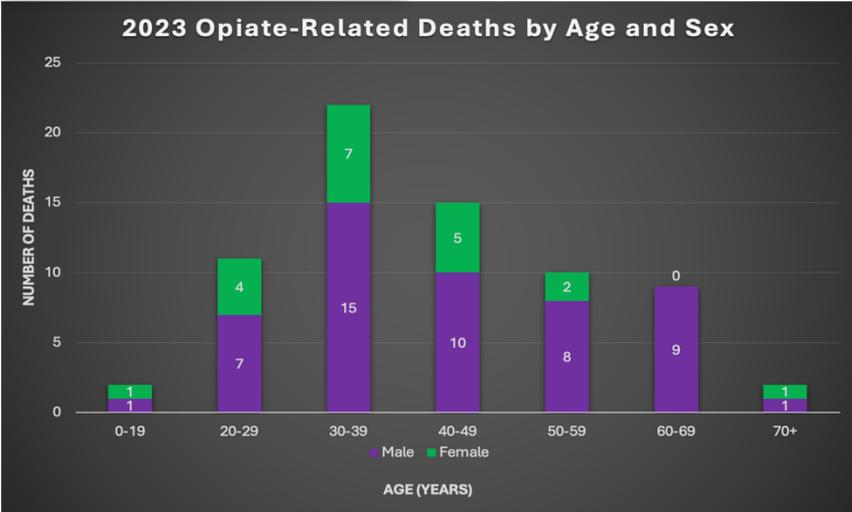
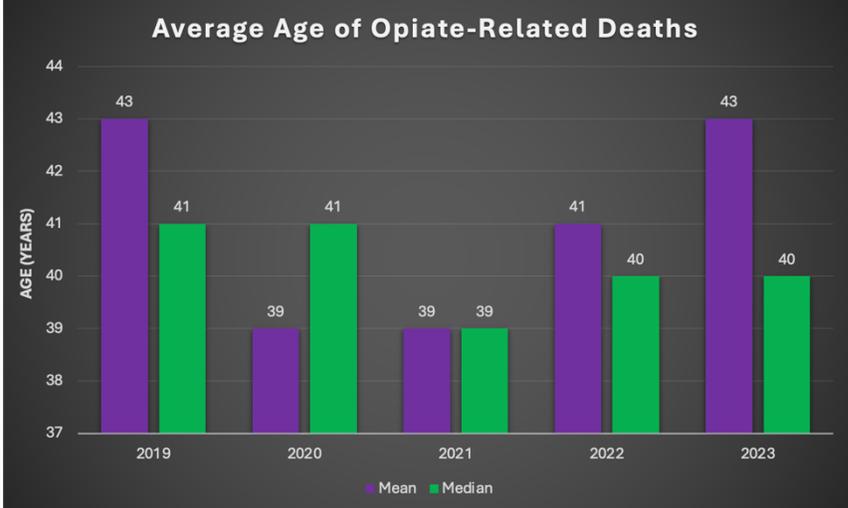
OPIATE – FENTANYL DEATHS

NOTE: “Opiate-Related Deaths” are identified as deaths CAUSED by opiates, as where “positive for opiates” is defined as having traces of opiates in their system at the time of death



Drug deaths have continued to intensify over the past several years. Although heroin was the initial identified killer, fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, soon began to take over as the new slayer. In 2012, Kane County had just 1 death due to fentanyl; in 2023, this number reached 71.

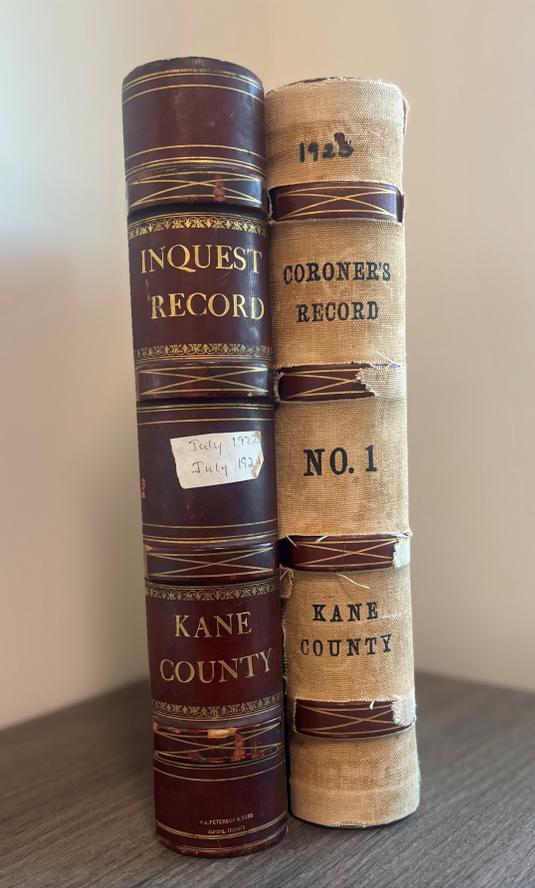
It is also important to point out that the opioid crisis is ever evolving. In 2023, for the first time, the Kane County Coroner’s Office investigated deaths that involved Xylazine and Bromazolam. These are being added to other drugs such as heroin, and are even deadlier when combined.



Furthermore, there is a common misconception that the opioid crisis is a “young person” issue. As we can see from the data, the majority of opiate-related deaths in 2023 occurred in individuals over the age of 40, with an average age of 43 years old.

LOOKING BACK 100 YEARS

The Kane County Coroner's Office in 1923



The **1920 Coroner's Record No. 1, Kane County** (Right) and the **1922 Coroner's Inquest Record, Kane County** (Left) are among the historical record books on file in Kane County Coroner Rob Russell's Office. The first book contains the **official records of Death Inquests** for the years 1920, 1921, and part of 1922. The next book contains the official records of Death Inquests for the remainder of 1922, all of 1923, and part of 1924.

Due to scientific advances, inquests are not now needed to definitively determine the cause and manner of death. In contrast, inquests often obstruct investigative efficiency. Because of this, the **Illinois General Assembly** changed the Coroner's Statute from stating "**shall**" do an inquest, to "**may**" do an inquest. This gives the coroners the option, under special circumstances, to conduct an inquest if necessary.

The **1923 Coroner's Records, Kane County** shows that the Coroner's Office held inquest into **137 deaths in 1923**, approximately the same number of deaths from the previous year (133 deaths in 1922). Reviewing these findings gives us interesting insight into what life in 1923 Kane County was like, and how the county has changed since.

While reviewing the 1923 Kane County Deaths, we can see the evolution, progress, and advancements within society that have led us to where we are today. For example, the 1923 Kane County Coroner's Office investigated a death in which a child died after finding and consuming her mother's prescription medication. While this was a terrible tragedy, situations like this and others like it have greatly contributed to safety procedures and precautions such as child-safety caps on prescription bottles that we see in place today.

Additionally, with the increasing availability of motor vehicles in 1923, we can see many changes and developments related to driver safety and accountability. One example relating to driver safety improvements came when a man was killed after his vehicle was struck by a train. After investigation, a jury recommended that "a signal be placed at this crossing on account of the dangerous condition of the road". Situations such as this are precisely why nowadays every railroad crossing and intersection has signs or signals in hopes of preventing incidences such as this. Another example, this one relating to driver accountability, came after the passenger of a motor vehicle was killed in an accident. After the investigation, it was found that the driver of the vehicle was driving carelessly at the time of the accident and was therefore charged with manslaughter. Instances such as this directly influenced the development of laws, rules, regulations, and restrictions for vehicles and their drivers.

**“A VOICE FOR THOSE
WHO CAN NO LONGER SPEAK FOR
THEMSELVES.”**

-THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND CORONERS

**THE KANE COUNTY CORONER’S OFFICE
DEDICATES THIS PUBLICATION TO THOSE WHO
LOST THEIR LIVES IN 2023, AND TO THEIR
FAMILIES.**

THEY ARE THE REASON WE DO WHAT WE DO.



**PROUDLY SERVING THE CITIZENS OF
KANE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

-CORONER ROB RUSSELL



The Kane County Coroner's Office, as a law enforcement agency, investigates deaths and provides critical services to surviving family members, relatives, and friends with compassion and dignity.

Should you have any questions regarding this Annual Report, or this office, please do not hesitate to contact Coroner Rob Russell

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<http://www.kanecountycoroner.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/KaneCountyCoronersOffice>