

Goodhue County: 3 mysteries, 1 driving frustration

By **RICHARD MERYHEW**, Star Tribune

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RED WING, MINN. -- Pat Thompson is in the business of solving crimes. As a captain with the Goodhue County Sheriff's Office and a longtime investigator, he's paid to help unravel the mysteries surrounding everything from stolen cars to stickups.

So when the 22-year police veteran and his colleagues get a high-profile case they can't crack, it wears on him. And right now, they've got three of them.

Three times in eight years Goodhue County authorities have been called to the Mississippi River to remove the body of a newborn baby found in the water. Despite intense public interest and more than 100 leads over the past nine years, the cases are unsolved.

"A day doesn't go by when I don't drive by one of those scenes and say 'Oh yeah, we're still working on that,'" said Thompson, who has spent most of his life living and working in Goodhue County, located about an hour south of the Twin Cities.

"We're used to solving our serious cases here. But right now, all three of them are looking like career cases."

The first baby, a girl, was found wrapped in a white

towel in a Red Wing harbor in 1999. The last, another girl, was found a year ago this week, when workers at Treasure Island Resort & Casino found her body floating in a marina slip near the casino.

In between, a newborn boy was found off a beach south of town in 2003. A blue towel was found near his body.

Authorities have said that DNA tests on the babies indicate that the first two found were probably Caucasian and probably born to the same mother. In each case, the baby's umbilical cord was attached.

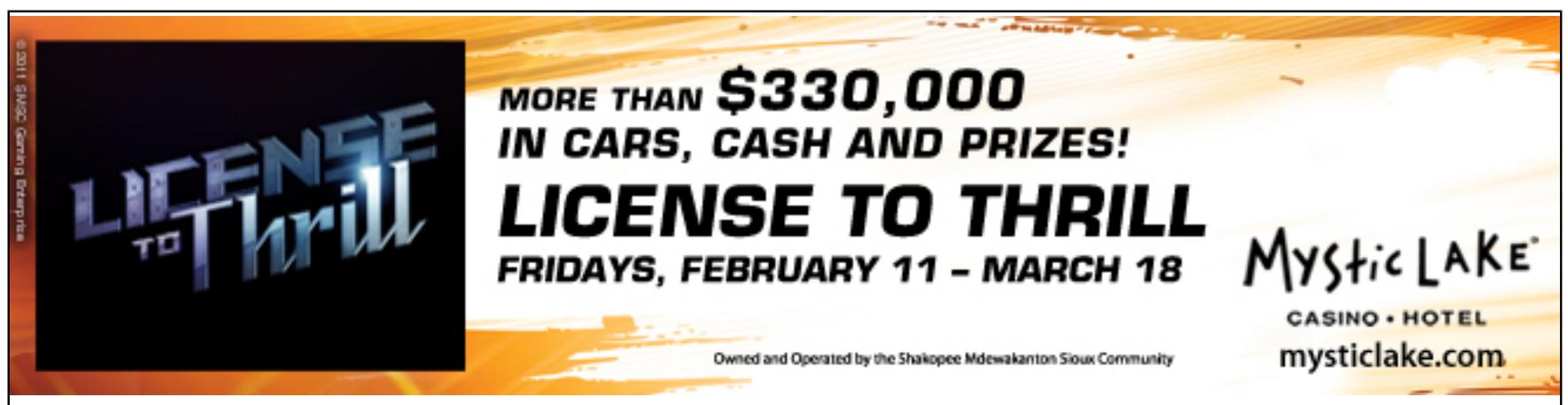
Tests on the third infant, a 7-pound, 21-inch girl with long black hair, indicated that she was not related to the others. Tests also revealed that there is as much as a 70 percent chance the baby is American Indian.

A promising lead

Over the years, investigators have combed the Mississippi riverbanks and knocked on hundreds of doors looking for clues. They've chased leads into the Dakotas and as far south as Florida. So far, they've obtained 35 DNA samples from potential suspects. None has matched, Thompson said.

Currently, they are waiting for word from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension lab in St. Paul on the outcome of another sample, taken from a woman who lived in the Goodhue County area at the time the first two babies were found.

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The woman has denied any involvement, Thompson said.

"Once we get a DNA sample that says 'This is the one' it's basically over," said Thompson, who oversees the county's investigative unit. "But it's a matter of getting to that point that's been so frustrating and difficult."

Without a DNA match, Thompson added, "short of a confession or admission from someone, it'll be very difficult to solve."

Jeanne Madtson, a Red Wing resident who, along with her husband, Don, buried the three infants in graves near the spot where they buried their stillborn daughter, Ann Marie, 19 years ago, said she has considered submitting a letter to the local newspaper in hopes of persuading the mothers, or someone who knows them, to contact authorities.

"It's just real baffling," she said. "I would think one of the mothers would have told, maybe, a really close, close friend or something. Somebody had to have known."

Toughest kind of case

Goodhue County investigators have handled other high-profile cases involving young children, including the disappearance of 3-year-old Jessica Swanson from her home in Cannon Falls in 1995. Regardless of the circumstances, authorities say, investigating the death of a child "really pulls on you," said Sheriff Dean Albers. "Most of the officers have

children, too."

Investigators didn't find Jessica's body for four years, after her mother's boyfriend confessed to the killing and told police where he put her remains.

Albers said that in the first week after Jessica disappeared, authorities marked time on a wall calendar, but eventually tore it down because it added to the frustration.

Thompson said the cases of the three babies have been just as trying.

"Psychologists say you see the worst in law enforcement," Thompson said. "And I personally don't think it gets any worse than putting a baby in the water."

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