

# BRainerd DISPATCH

LAKES AREA AND CENTRAL MINNESOTA SINCE 1881

## WHEN SHE VANISHED

18 years after the disappearance and murder of Rachel Anthony, her killer remains a mystery

By Chelsey Perkins  
Community Editor

### PINE RIVER

**A** Tuesday night in February 2001, 10 o'clock. The last of the league bowlers trickle out of the bowling alley, a few stools are warm at the American Legion, the occasional motorist stopping for a quick fuel-up. Four inches of fresh, dry snow skitters across ice beneath the feet of those seeking refuge from the arctic temperatures.

On Pine River's Barclay Avenue, the tailpipe of a parked Ford Escort puffs exhaust into the frozen air, the engine fighting to warm. Its owner finishes her shift inside the nearby liquor store, after she'd served one last customer as the clock struck closing time.

That car sat idling in the same spot nearly three hours later, when a Pine River police officer noticed it in front of the still-lit Ultimate Liquors.

But Rachel Anthony was gone. And months later the body of the 50-year-old liquor clerk would be found strangled and discarded down a roadside embankment 10 miles away.

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BD Video  
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“

*If I was a person or persons that did this, knowing the advances in technology we have, I wouldn't be super comfortable right now.”*

DAVE BJERGA,  
retired BCA agent

Submitted photo

This photo of Rachel Anthony still hangs in the former Ultimate Liquors store, now Barstock Liquors, on Highway 371 in Pine River.

A photograph of a younger Rachel Anthony who disappeared the night of Feb. 27, 2001, at the end of her shift at Ultimate Liquors.

Submitted photo



## They wanted to make a change, so they changed how they wanted to do it

### Crow Wing Energized health summit features cultural anthropologist

By Frank Lee  
Staff Writer

**BAXTER** — Crow Wing Energized's mission in part is to make the healthy choice the easy choice, but getting county residents to change their unhealthy behavior is easier said than done.

The intent of the collaborative grassroots movement's sixth annual Health and Wellness Summit on Friday, March 1, was to help residents establish healthier habits.

"We know it's notoriously difficult. Many programs don't work because there isn't that human-centered insight that comes from some of these methods and techniques that get you closer to the end user," said Christine Chastain, the keynote speaker and summit facilitator.

Crow Wing Energized invited the community to the free event in Baxter to participate in work sessions to generate positive behavior changes to impact health and wellness in the county.



Photos & Video by Frank Lee / Brainerd Dispatch  
Christine Chastain, a cultural anthropologist, talks about changing behavior at the sixth annual Crow Wing Energized Health and Wellness Summit Friday, March 1, at Lakewood Evangelical Free Church in Baxter.

Crow Wing Energized is led and funded by Crow Wing County, Essentia Health and the Statewide Health Improvement Program. More

ENERGIZED: Page A11

## Bill would let Minn. school leaders escape funding cuts, jail time for not making up snow days

By Christopher Magan  
St. Paul Pioneer Press

**ST. PAUL** — Minnesota's school leaders can avoid funding cuts and even jail time if a bill at the Legislature allowing snow days to be counted as school days becomes law.

The change would only be for this school year, when frigid temps and record February snowfall forced schools to close for safety reasons. Many districts have taken a week or more off because of winter weather



Nelson

and typically only build a few extra days into their schedule to account for arctic temperatures and snow.

State law requires students attend school for a set number of instructional hours each year. If a district fails to meet the threshold, funding can be cut and school staff could potentially face jail

time.

A state Department of Education spokesman said he was not aware of any time when a district lost funding or educators were jailed for not meeting the instruction time standard because of inclement weather.

"Across our state, extraordinary winter weather circumstances have prevented students from safely attending school," Sen. Carla Nelson, R-Rochester,

SNOW DAYS: Page A7



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch Video

Pierz firefighters try to extinguish a fire in dairy barn containing 30 cows at a farm on County Road 139 north of Harding. Brainerd Fire Department was also called for mutual aid with the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office responding.

## Barn fire claims 30 cows in Friday night blaze

**HARDING** — Flames gutted a barn and killed approximately 30 dairy cows in a fire Friday, March 1, on the 20000 block of County Road 139 northeast of Harding.

At roughly 6:40 p.m., the Pierz Fire Department was notified of a barn fire at the property owned by Jill Eich, who reportedly contacted dispatch. Firefighters came upon a barn partially engulfed in flames, with the fire primarily concentrated to one end of the building and part of the roof collapsed. It took firefighters roughly 20 minutes to subdue the fire.

While property owners and no other animals were harmed by

the blaze, Pierz Fire Chief Chris Young confirmed roughly 30 cows succumbed to the flames.

"It's always difficult when animals like that are involved," Young told the Dispatch during a phone interview. "But, nobody was injured."

The cause of the fire is currently unknown, pending the results of an investigation by the State Fire Marshal's Office.

The Brainerd Fire Department responded to calls for mutual, but canceled en route. The Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office assisted at the scene.

## Brainerd Dispatch to no longer include USA Today pages in its e-edition

Starting Monday, March 4, the Brainerd Dispatch e-edition will no longer include pages from the USA Today newspaper.

Forum Communications Co., the Dispatch's parent company, recently announced it was discontinuing its partnership with

USA Today.

Instead, the Dispatch will feature FCC-produced Home & Abroad nation/world pages using reports from The New York Times, The Washington Post and Tribune Media, based in Chicago.

— Editor Matt Erickson

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Rachel Anthony

ANTHONY

From Page A1

Eighteen years later, the person – or people – who took Rachel’s life have never paid for their crime. Those who loved Rachel are left to wonder why anyone would murder the bright, bubbly woman who adored her grandchildren and seemed well-liked by everyone. And many who call the city of less than 1,000 home lost a sense of security they may never regain.

The night that changed everything

For a year and a half, Rachel worked the night shift alone at Ultimate Liquors after spending the day with her young grandsons at the rural Pequot Lakes home she shared with daughter Jessica and her former son-in-law.

Feb. 27, 2001, was a winter day much like those in recent memory – especially snowy and unbearably cold. The snow measured 21 inches deep and the low temperature recorded that date was 17 below zero at the nearby Pine River Dam. It felt even colder with the wind chill – by 10 p.m., it approached 30 degrees below in Brainerd, 30 miles south.

Jessica Anthony knows it was a Tuesday when her mother vanished. She remembers because Tuesday was women’s league night at Community Bowl, a block away from the liquor store. Jessica bowled with her team that night, finishing about 9:15 p.m.

“A lot of Tuesdays, sometimes I would go over and say hi to her before heading home. And occasionally I’d help her finish stocking up one of the refrigerators,” Jessica said during a phone interview earlier this month. “I remember sitting in my car, looking at her car across the street, and debating about going to help her. And I thought, ‘It’s really cold outside, and I’m really tired.’ And I decided to go home. ... What if I’d gone in? Would something different have happened if I’d gone in to say hi?”

Between midnight and 1 a.m. Feb. 28, 2001, the police officer noticed Rachel’s car and began investigating. The front door of the liquor store was locked, but the back door swung open when the officer tried it. Nothing looked amiss, but Rachel’s coat, purse and cigarettes remained. No Rachel.

Steve Abraham, Pine River police chief at the time, awoke to a phone call from the officer.

“I got out of bed, got dressed, came in and we searched the surrounding area for, oh I don’t know, a half-mile around,” Abraham said by phone Tuesday. “The snow had been really deep at that time. There was no tracks in the snow, nothing. We beat on every door for several blocks around, getting people out of bed, seeing if they’d seen anything at all. No one had.”

Officers theorized the perpetrator took Rachel from the back alley while she was disposing of

garbage, just before she planned to head home. Jessica told police her mother usually followed a when closing down the business.

“She had a routine of going out, unlocking the front door, starting her car to warm it up, coming back in, locking the front door. Then taking the garbage out the back and then coming back through the back, lock that door and then come back through the front and leave,” Jessica said.

Abraham said despite police believing the crime occurred in the alley, evidence was impossible to come by.

“You could literally get on your hands and knees and look across that ice, and you couldn’t see anything,” Abraham said. “It was just glare ice.”

Investigators from Cass County and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension joined in the efforts to find Rachel. A Minnesota State Patrol helicopter used infrared technology to search from the air, Abraham said.

Jessica worried earlier in the night when her mother didn’t come home, but the liquor store was in the process of moving to a new building, and Rachel worked atypical hours to help. A phone call from police woke up Jessica. Also informed were Kim Terhaar and her ex-husband, who owned Ultimate Liquors at the time. The owners confirmed for police another puzzling piece – no robbery of money or product appeared to have occurred at the store. Although the store was equipped with security cameras, they were not recording that night.

By morning, Pine River began to wake up. Still, no Rachel. Jessica called her sister Tricia Lehr with the news.

“I don’t really remember much of that morning, just knowing I had to get up there, I had to get up to Minnesota. I just knew I needed to be there for whatever might happen,” Tricia said by phone last week.

She and husband Dan made arrangements with work and took off on the 16-hour drive west from Pennsylvania, sitting mostly in silence. “I remember I counted how many cops I passed, flying down the road,” Tricia said. “I didn’t get pulled over, thankfully.”

Meanwhile, in Ohio, her brother Robert Mozden received word of his mother’s disappearance when his father showed up at the door.

“That was the gut-wrenching shock, if you will. ... A bombshell just dropped in my lap,” Mozden said during a phone interview. Soon after, Mozden took the first plane ride of his life to help hang flyers with his sisters.

Those in town grappled with the news, recalling where they were and what they were doing when Rachel vanished. Down the block from the liquor store, Bonnie Christensen processed income taxes instead of bowling with her own league team as usual. They’d finished early, she said, because the other team didn’t have enough bowlers.

“I worked until like a quarter after nine, right

here on this street, door wide open (unlocked), working,” Christensen said Tuesday, Feb. 26, from her desk at Hanneken Insurance. “And then found out the next day she was missing.”

Across town, Sharon Fey worried about her 16-year-old daughter, who was late home from her shift at Carl’s Market.

“She didn’t get home until about 9:30 or 10, and I questioned her, because I said I was concerned. Back then, there was not cellphones, at least not for her,” Fey said Tuesday during her shift at Lifehouse Coffee. “So I was concerned, and she said, ‘Oh Mom, what is there to worry about? Nothing ever happens in Pine River.’ And then the next morning we found out that just across the street was where she had disappeared, probably within an hour after my daughter had gotten home.”

For weeks, Rachel’s friends and family did what anyone would do – helped in any way they could and prayed for her return. Tips poured into police in the beginning, though none yielded information on Rachel’s whereabouts. Winter lingered, snowbanks piled high. No sign of Rachel anywhere. Until April, when on Friday the 13th, four teenagers on horseback made a gruesome discovery on a road between Breezy Point and Pequot Lakes.

Spanning 1 mile, Nelson Road runs north-south and connects Buschmann and Wild Acre roads. Wooded and hilly, the street is sparsely dotted with homes along with a large gravel pit, known locally as the Swenson pit. Across the street, southeast of the pit’s entrance, Rachel’s body lay about 15 feet down an embankment giving way to a wetland. The search was over for Rachel, and on for whomever left her there.

Coincidentally, Chief Abraham’s own son was among the horseback riders who became part of Rachel’s story. Perched atop the horses while traveling at a slow pace, the riders spotted what those driving by had not.

“The kids, after they found the body, they were absolutely terrified that whoever killed her, Rachel, was going to come after them because they found the body,” Abraham said. “I had a hell of a time convincing them that when you dump a body in a ditch, you’re dumping it there to be found. He wanted the body found, or they wanted the body found. ... They didn’t want to believe me for quite some time. They were pretty scared kids.”

A vibrant life cut short

Rachel Anthony was born May 30, 1950, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Douglass Pettet and Lucille Tyhulski. She grew up in Garfield Heights, a suburb of Cleveland. The second oldest of four children, Rachel’s father died when she was a year and a half old, leaving Lucille with Rachel and sister Connie Clark.

Lucille sold Avon for awhile and then moved the children to California



Rachel Anthony

for two years while she worked for Pacific Bell. She eventually returned to Ohio and married Ed Tyhulski, who worked in the Republic steel refinery in Cleveland, and had two more children, Marilyn and Ray.

Rachel was undeniably smart, according to Connie.

“Because she was so smart she had a tendency to get in trouble,” Connie wrote in an email. “We fought just like any other siblings would, but never lost our love for each other.”

At 19, Rachel married Raymond Mozden and had a son, Robert. Two years later, she divorced, and Robert went to live with his father. After a lifetime mostly apart, Robert said he and his mother were in the process of reconciling, slowly but surely, before her death.

Rachel gave birth to her two daughters – Jessica in 1974 and Tricia in 1976 – before marrying the girls’ adoptive father, Frank Anthony, in 1984. She also gained two stepchildren, Brian Anthony and Cherie Pederson. The family eventually made their way to Princeton, about 30 miles east of St. Cloud. There, they lived on a hobby farm replete with animals of all kinds, indoors and out, and a massive garden.

“She just had that natural animal whisperer-type thing,” Jessica said. “When we had some baby geese that were hatched, I just remember being jealous because these baby geese imprinted on her and would follow around her everywhere. They didn’t want anything to do with the rest of us.”

Tricia recalled her mother’s aptitude with plants, particularly those in the house.

“She had plant lights, and she had them in this corner. It was like a little jungle corner, with all these houseplants,” Tricia said.

These were just two of the many attributes that made up Rachel, remembered for her eclectic taste in music, magnetic personality, her love for books and Scrabble and photography and the spectacle of nature, particularly thunderstorms, meteor showers and the northern lights.

Everyone who spoke of her remarked on her intelligence. Sister Connie said that contributed to her restlessness in settling on a vocation. She worked a number of jobs over the years, from driving instructor to mall Santa, but her true passion came putting pen to paper. Poetry, journalism, short stories, a children’s book about her farm animals – she wrote it all. She freelanced whenever she could, and won a poetry award for a 1984 poem about the drought in the southwestern United States and Mexico.

She once wrote a piece for Coventry Village News, a newsletter for a Cleveland Heights neighborhood, addressing women’s safety in the wake of two stranger rapes. In hindsight, her words have taken on an eerie quality.

“Caution is their advice to women in the neighborhood,” Rachel wrote in 1980. “Develop

some kind of ‘buddy system’ with friends or neighbors, so that when you have to come home alone late at night, someone can be there to meet you that’s friend instead of foe.”

In about 1996, having divorced her second husband a few years earlier, Rachel moved to the lakes area to be closer to her daughter Jessica. A few years later, when she applied for the last job she’d ever work, Kim Terhaar said she liked Rachel immediately. She became a trusted, reliable employee of Ultimate Liquors.

“She was fun, and outgoing and talkative,” Kim said. “She had a presence about her, and she had beautiful blue eyes. ... A really cool lady, and a good friend.”

Who killed Rachel Anthony?

Since the discovery of Rachel’s body, an autopsy of which revealed she died of asphyxia due to homicidal violence, investigators have worked to determine who was responsible. Theories vary on who killed Rachel and why, and with no major suspects ever identified, the debate continues. Generally speaking, however, law enforcement officials leaned toward the likelihood the murderer is, or was at the time, a local.

Dave Bjerga was a BCA agent tasked with death investigations at the time. A native of the area who once worked at the Crow Wing County Sheriff’s Office, Bjerga has since retired from the agency and returned to living up north. Bjerga said the location of Rachel’s body played a major role in the suspect profile.

While used by locals as a shortcut, avoiding county highways, Nelson Road is not one most people from out of town seem to know.

“We went to the FBI and had this case looked at, and they agreed with us, that this is somebody who knows this area of southern Cass and northern Crow Wing County,” Bjerga said during a phone interview Tuesday. “To us, that just gave us more incentive to now spread out the parameters of our search for suspects, not just around Pine River, but to those two areas.”

Cass County Sheriff Tom Burch, who was chief deputy at the time of Rachel’s death, said he thinks it’s important not to get too hung up on the local suspect theory.

“If you only focus locally, you could really jeopardize searching for suspects,” Burch said. “It was talked about, but we have to keep a broader, you have to keep your mind open and make sure that you’re not looking beyond what you’ve found. You have to make sure you’re including all possible suspects.”

Among those investigated were people considered suspects in another unsolved murder case in the Pine River area. In 1984, Clarence and Marge Paulson, a father and daughter, disappeared from their home. Six years later, a worker dismantling a 19th-century farmhouse in rural Pine River discovered their skeletal remains.

“We cross-referenced those (suspect) names with the Rachel Anthony case,” Bjerga said. “In

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