



Physical Anthropology Section – 2010

H78 Southeast Texas Applied Forensic Science Facility (STAFS) at Sam Houston State University: A New Forensic Anthropology Human Decomposition Facility

Joan A. Bytheway, PhD*, Sam Houston State University, Chemistry & Forensic Science Building, 1003 Bowers Boulevard, Box 2525, Huntsville, TX 77340

The goal of this presentation is to introduce the new willied-body donor program and human decomposition facility at Sam Houston State University and discuss current research and training opportunities being conducted there.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by bringing awareness to this new research and training facility. This facility can be used by researchers to perform various types of research on human cadavers.

In 2007, a proposal for the development of a willied-body donor program and forensic anthropology human decomposition facility was submitted to the administration of Sam Houston State University. The proposal was approved March 12, 2008 and internal funding was allocated for the construction of an outdoor facility and building. Construction of the outdoor facility began in early September 2008. The outdoor facility was completed in October 2008. The construction of the building began in January 2009 and was completed in July 2009. Nine acres of a 247 acre parcel, managed by the Center for Biological Field Studies, was dedicated to the STAFS facility. Both internal and external administrative and governmental requirements were satisfied during the latter part of 2008 and the beginning of 2009.

This new facility is dedicated to research, education, and training for anthropologists, entomologists, other forensic experts, law enforcement agents and students. The College of Criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University is one of the oldest and largest criminal justice education and training facilities. It educates and trains both national and international graduate and undergraduate students and law enforcement agents. The College was established by the Texas legislature in 1965 under House Resolution 469, which directed the university to establish a program of excellence in research, training, technical assistance and consultant services, and continuing education. In 2001, the College of Criminal Justice began a Forensic Science Masters program which was accredited in 2009. In 2006, the College of Criminal Justice and the forensic science program began pursuing the development of the STAFS facility.

Outdoor Facility: As stated above, the nine acre parcel is located within a 247 acre parcel owned by the university. It is restricted to authorized personnel only by a numerical code gate entry and fencing surrounds the whole 247 acre perimeter. A portion of the north, east, and south property borders abut to the Sam Houston State Park. The west property line abuts to privately-owned, undeveloped forest land.

One acre of the nine acre parcel is enclosed with maximum security fence and is used for research on human cadavers that are donated to the facility. The maximum security fence consists of an 8' chain link fence with privacy slats and razor wire attached to the top. Entry to the facility is restricted to a man and field gate, visible from the building. A variety of environmental settings are enclosed in the acre, such as open, unobstructed areas, wooded, shaded, and sun exposed areas. A creek runs through a corner of the acre and an area has been designated for automobile or small building structures for indoor body depositions.

Indoor Facility: The building is located approximately fifty yards from the outdoor facility and is approximately 2,400 square feet. The building contains a necropsy suite, a lab prep room, a collection room, walk-in freezer and cooler units, a digital radiograph area, and an office. The building is equipped with sophisticated equipment, such as a digital radiograph unit and a SpecFinder microscope. It is also equipped with compound and stereomicroscopes, and multiple computer workstations.

The facility has received six body donations as of July 2009 and multiple research projects are underway.

Forensic Anthropology, Human Decomposition, Willied-Body Donor Program