

# This police artist's work isn't for faint of heart

**PEOPLE:** The forensic expert re-creates faces from skulls to speak for the dead.

By **ANNE C. MULKERN**  
The Orange County Register

Michael Streed hides his handiwork from the neighbors.

In the garage of his Corona home, Streed, an Orange police officer and forensic expert, builds faces out of skulls to help police solve baffling murder cases.

It's not intended for the squeamish.

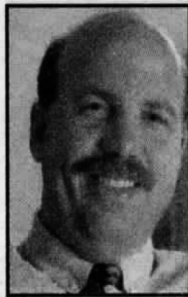
"My wife just cracks up," said Streed, 37. "She says, 'Just don't

let the neighbors see you.'"

Streed this week was credited with helping solve a 17-year-old murder mystery. Working with two skulls found in the desert, he drew sketches of how two dead men probably looked while alive. A woman who saw the sketches in a newspaper identified the men as Huntington Beach brothers Allan G. Taylor, 22, and Charles D. Taylor, 20, who were kidnapped in 1978. Dental records confirmed the match.

"I'm ecstatic," Streed said Thursday after learning of the positive identification. "I almost fell down when I heard."

Such is the reward of Streed's work. Because of his efforts, he knows a family can finish griev-



**MICHAEL STREED:** He is 'ecstatic' that his efforts helped solve a 17-year-old murder mystery.

ing for the men it lost, but never buried. And detectives might be able to solve a murder. One of the skulls had a bullet hole, which could provide evidence to reopen the case against suspect Thomas F. Pugh. He was convicted of murder in the case but freed in 1985 when the conviction was overturned on appeal.

In a way, Streed says, he speaks for the dead. A 17-year police veteran, he has melded forensic work with patrol duties since the beginning of his career.

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# MYSTERY: Officer brings skulls back to 'life'

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Streed started by drawing composites, then studied skull re-creation with experts at the University of Oklahoma and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

About two years ago, Streed began working free-lance for the San Bernardino and Riverside county coroners' offices. When police investigators or motorists discover bones in the desert, Streed goes to work re-creating faces of the deceased.

The work is based in anthropological research. From the bones, anthropologists can determine gender, race, approximate age and stature of the dead. Skulls also reveal the structure of faces.

From the shape of the eye sockets, Streed can tell the shape of the brows. From the ear holes, he determines the size of the ears. From the length of the nose spine — the bone at the base of the nose — he can tell how far the

nose would protrude. The jaw line shows the width of the face.

And some of the work is educated guessing, Streed said. In the case of the Huntington Beach brothers, he had no indications about the men's hair. So he considered the year they vanished — 1978 — and their ages — about 17 to 20 — and he drew a popular style from that time.

Once Streed knows the structure of the face, he builds a model using one of two methods. The first, used with the Huntington Beach brothers, is to build a face on the skull with thin rubber tubing for the flesh. The tubing is lightweight and will not damage the skull.

When a skull can withstand weight, he uses clay to mold a bust of the person atop the bone.

With the skull of one woman found in the desert, Streed placed a curly blond wig on top, used prosthetic eyes and brushed light pink chalk on the lips.

Streed brought the finished

product to the Coroner's Office. Subsequently, each time he visited the office, he noticed that the woman's clay mold was always turned with its face to the wall. The workers, he said, were too unnerved by the woman, who appeared to be looking at them.

Streed knows his vocation brings out people's morbid curiosity. At the grocery store, clerks ask him, "Got any new skulls?" The neighborhood children are curious, he said, but his two sons, Michael Jr., 13, and Christopher, 11, know the garage is off-limits.

His wife, Mary, 37, works for the Orange County sheriff's crime lab matching fingerprints, so she isn't unnerved when he puts skulls on the dining room table.

Yet Streed realizes the seriousness of his task.

"This is a person. This is someone's son or daughter," he said. "We try to treat them as respectfully as we can."