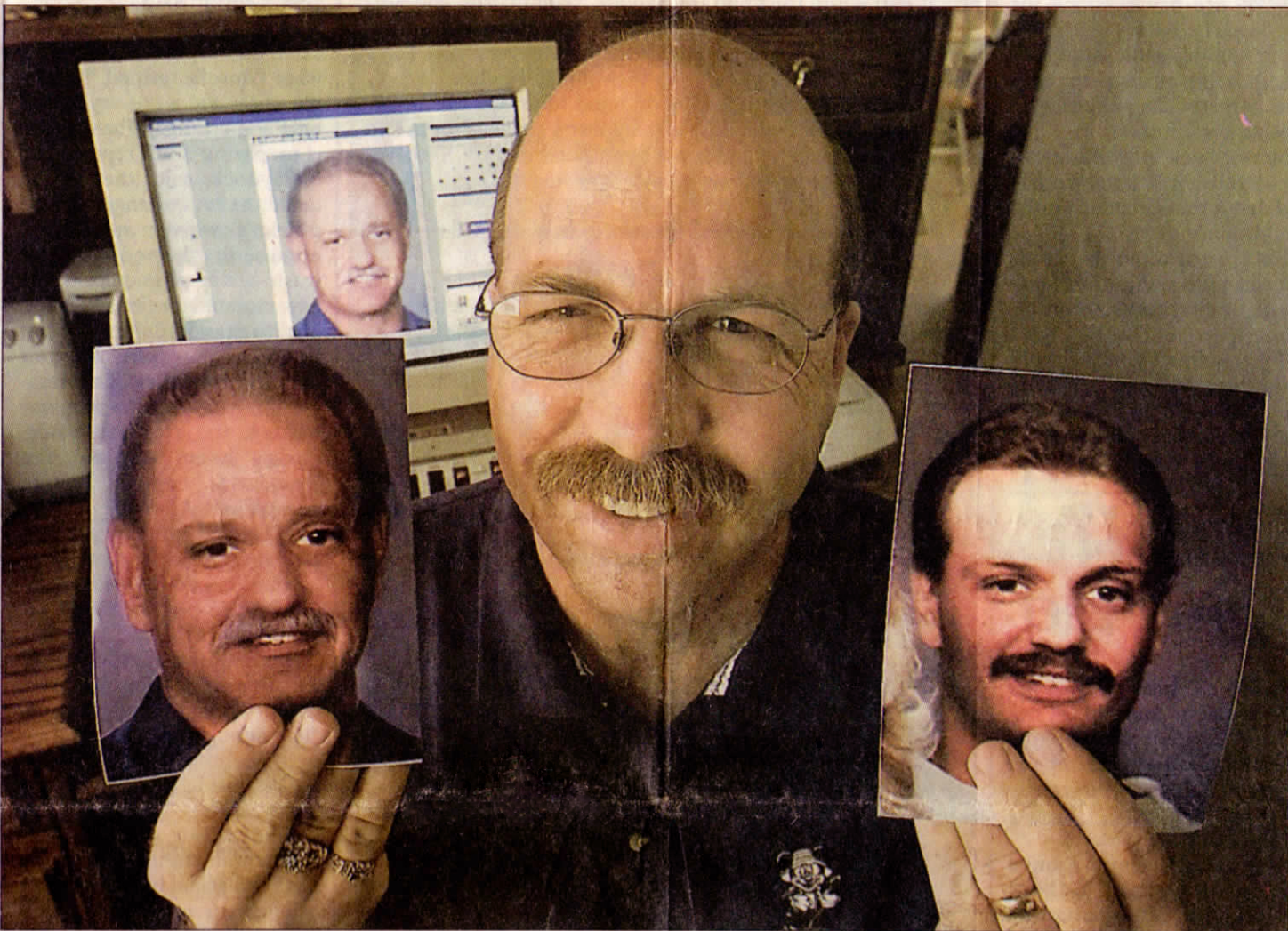


'There's a lot of artistic input into (making age-enhanced photos). ... Every time I think I should just stop doing it, I get a letter from someone thanking me.'

MIKE STREED

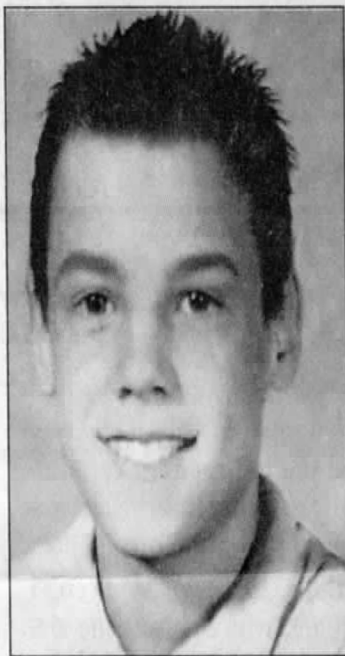
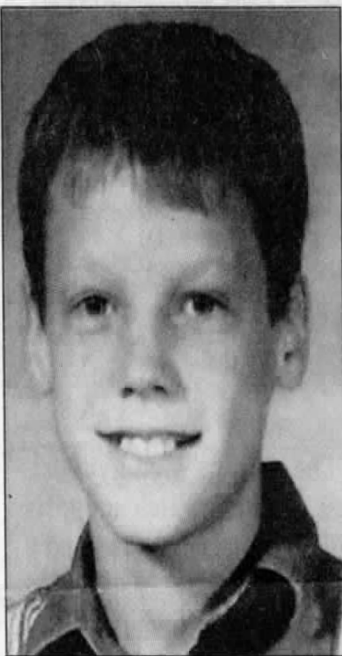
Orange police forensic artist



MIKE STREED, 43, a forensic artist for the Orange Police Department, shows photos of a deceased man at age 28, right, and a computer-manipulated image projecting the man's appearance 42 years later, left • Photos: Michael Kitada / The Register

Death-defying images

People • Families ask local police artist to create pictures of deceased loved ones at later age.



COMPUTER SOFTWARE transforms a photo of a deceased 10-year-old boy, left, into an image of him at age 15. Parents mourning the loss of children say the images help them cope.

MORE INSIDE **Healing** - Police artist Streed pays an emotional price but says it's worth it.

By **PAIGE AUSTIN**
The Orange Country Register

Cindy Lazier stands over a grave, quietly crying and whispering.

Her daughter, Lauren, 7, died in an accident a year ago on her way to a Labor Day family picnic. Lazier visits her grave every day. On this day, she's clutching a photo of a bright blue-eyed, freckle-nosed girl - an image of the teen-ager her daughter might have become.

"Oh, baby, you're 16 in the picture and you look so different," Lazier cries to the grave. "So much time missed, but my heart would just know this child."

The child Lazier sees is a

fabrication of Orange police forensic artist Mike Streed, who uses digital techniques to add years to images of the deceased in an unusual method of helping bereaved families.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children developed the technique to help find missing children, training Streed and other forensic artists over the past decade. Streed, among the nation's premier police artists, is one of the few in the nation to create age-progressed portraits for grieving families.

"There seems to be a real need for it," said Glenn Miller, age-progression specialist at the center.

Miller said the center has

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received one or two calls a week for age progressions for at least a decade, a small but steady demand. The aged images can lead to powerful healing, psychologists and clergy say, but they also carry a risk of emotional hazards.

Lazier, an Ohio resident, has been unable to reconcile herself with the loss of her daughter.

"I can't walk through my house without seeing her. Everything speaks of her," she said.

"I don't even know if there are words to describe the emptiness, the coldness, the brokenness. I'm so afraid people will forget her. I'm so afraid I'll forget the sound of her voice."

She commissioned 16-year-old and 25-year-old images of her daughter, portraits that disturb and comfort her.

"When I ripped open that envelope, I was looking at this stranger. ... I had missed all that time with her," she said. "Every time I see a child, I don't wonder anymore if that's what Lauren would look like."

It's natural for people to need to know exactly what they've lost, said Steven Schandler, Chapman University professor of psychology and director of psychology research.

That's why the United States is still in Vietnam trying to recover the bodies of soldiers decades after the conflict ended, he said.

"It's a process of understanding the total nature of the loss. It makes the loss real."

Similarly, these photos can help people grieve for the future they have lost. But Schandler says the photos

should be combined with bereavement counseling.

"It's tantamount to looking at gruesome pictures on the Internet. They're emotionally arousing and leave a lasting impression," he said.

The Rev. Valentin Ramon of La Purisima Catholic Church in El Modena sees no spiritual harm in the technique, but he's not sure how comforting it is.

People are like plants, he tells the bereaved families he counsels. Some are meant to grow like old majestic trees, and others are flowers meant to beautify the world for the short time they are here.

"Why remember them as anything but what they were?" he said.

Curiosity propelled Charlotte Fye of Iowa, the wife of a minister, to seek a photo of her son, John, at age 52.

John died of a brain tumor 42 years ago at age 10.

The pain eases over time, but the loss will always be with her, Fye said.

"All these years we've wondered what he would look like."

In the photo, he has salt-and-pepper hair and soft smile lines around his mouth and eyes.

"He has a gentle look about him and he seems distinguished, like my husband," Fye said. "He looks like the kind of man you could connect with."

The photo is framed on her wall.

"I see it every day when I lie down for a nap," she said.

"I think the worst thing that can happen is that people will forget that that child was here on Earth and had lived."

"A mother needs to know that people remember that child was here, even after 42 years."