

Body farm for researchers and detectives opens near Tampa

May 12 2017, by Tamara Lush

A "body farm" where researchers can study how corpses decompose will open next week in the Tampa Bay area with the burial of four donated bodies.

Officials broke ground Friday on the Adam Kennedy Forensics Field, a five-acre patch of land north of Tampa. It's the seventh such facility in the nation and the first in Florida's subtropical environment. The oldest and most famous [body](#) farm in the U.S. is at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Officials in Florida hope their farm, to be used at first by detectives and forensic anthropologists at the nearby University of South Florida, will draw scientists from other countries and grow to be the largest in the world.

"Our forensic crime scene investigators will get premium training as a result of this," said former Pasco County Sheriff Bob White. "This will enhance our training tenfold."

Dr. Erin Kimmerle, a forensic anthropologist at USF, predicts that by studying how bodies react in Florida's sweltering humidity, more evidence will be preserved and breakthroughs made in real-life-cases. The research also would benefit other countries with subtropical and tropical climates, she said.

Bodies are obtained by donation. The first four will be buried next week,

and in January, Kimmerle and other researchers will hold a course for detectives on exhumation. Later, other bodies will be exposed to water and buried during different seasons to determine how different factors affect decomposition and evidence. After the bodies are studied, the skeletons will be cleaned and preserved and made available for future research.

"The legacy of the donations, it is forever," said Kimmerle.

About 30 people have already filled out paperwork to donate their bodies to the farm when they die. Kimmerle said if someone who wants to donate dies within 200 miles of the facility, researchers will pick up the body at no cost. Anyone beyond that range would have to pay for their body to be transported to the facility.

While the center is currently a field and grove of trees near the Pasco County Jail, officials eventually hope to build an indoor-outdoor training center that would include classrooms, a morgue, a training facility and evidence storage.

The Florida Legislature tucked \$4.3 million for the facility in this year's state budget, but it's unclear whether Gov. Rick Scott will approve the budget. Kimmerle and Pasco County Sheriff Chris Nocco said they'll also raise outside money for the project.

For now, researchers are concentrating on the science. The field is named after one of the people who will be buried next week.

Adam Kennedy, a 46-year-old principal at a local elementary school, died in a car wreck in January. His widow Abigail Kennedy said her husband always wanted to donate his body to science. On Friday, she spoke to a crowd at the forensics field.

"There's so much bittersweet in all of this. Adam wanted to continue teaching after his death," she said. "It would be my last gift to education, he'd say. This couldn't be more perfect."

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