

1990

Patrolman Ronald Andolsek
Chief Dennis T. Yarborough

Kirtland Police Department

At the time that they received their award it was 971 days. Over 2 years and 8 months of their lives. In terms of a normal police investigation, a lifetime. But given the scope of the investigation, given the impact on a family, a community, the officers involved, and the entire legal system, the 971 days mean very little. After all, the horror and evil that descended on the community of Kirtland in 1988 has left a mark on Lake County which will never be erased.

In May, 1988, Kirtland Police began to hear rumors of violent plans involving the followers of Jeffrey D. Lundgren, the leader of a cult of people who had separated themselves from the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio. Officers of the department led by Chief Dennis Yarborough and lead investigator Patrolman Ronald Andolsek, as well as agents of the FBI, began investigating the group based on rumors that they were planning a violent act against the Kirtland Temple. As they gathered intelligence about the group, the members suddenly disappeared.

For a while, things were quiet. Then came the rumors. The sect had killed an entire family. Dennis Avery, his wife and three children were also followers of Lundgren. However, they did not fit in totally with the group, and on April 17, 1989, all five were brutally murdered in a barn on the property that Lundgren had rented. The five bodies were then buried in a pit in the barn, and the excavation covered over by a mound of household junk.

Once details of the rumors were confirmed, the Kirtland Police Department moved on them and excavated the barn. The bodies of the Avery family were discovered, each dead of gunshot wounds. Thus, an investigation of a potential cult turned into a mass murder investigation. Eventually 13 members of the Lundgren sect were tracked down, tried, and convicted into their parts in the murders of the Averys. At the time that they received their awards, the criminal cases were still ongoing.

The investigation was a model of cooperation by law enforcement agencies here and nationwide. Eventually a reported 31 police departments had a hand in the investigation. Locally, the Lake County Sheriff's Department and the Lake County Crime Lab played large parts in the case.

Patrolman Andolsek was nominated for the award by Chief Yarborough for his work on the investigation. Unbeknownst to Yarborough, a letter from Lake County

Sheriff Patrick Walsh nominated him. Both officers were chosen for the award. Yarborough stated, "I was totally shocked and extremely surprised to receive the award. It's always uplifting to find there are people that appreciate your efforts."

Andolsek would remark that working this case had robbed him of his personal life. "One thing I learned from this is to be prepared," he said. "There had to be sufficient planning for something like this possibly happening in any community."

The two officers received the Jorge Medina Distinguished Service Award at the annual Blue Coats banquet and meeting on January 23, 1991 held at Hellriegel's Inn.

Andolsek has retired from the Kirtland Police Department. He then took a position as the investigator for the Lake County Coroner. Yarborough, at the time of his award, was looking forward to taking a relaxing vacation and getting back into the habits he enjoyed such as jogging. Ironically, Yarborough died while enjoying a run on April 23, 1998.

Meanwhile Lake County, Kirtland, and anyone who had any part of the case, either personal, investigative, or due to the legal proceedings, were forever changed.