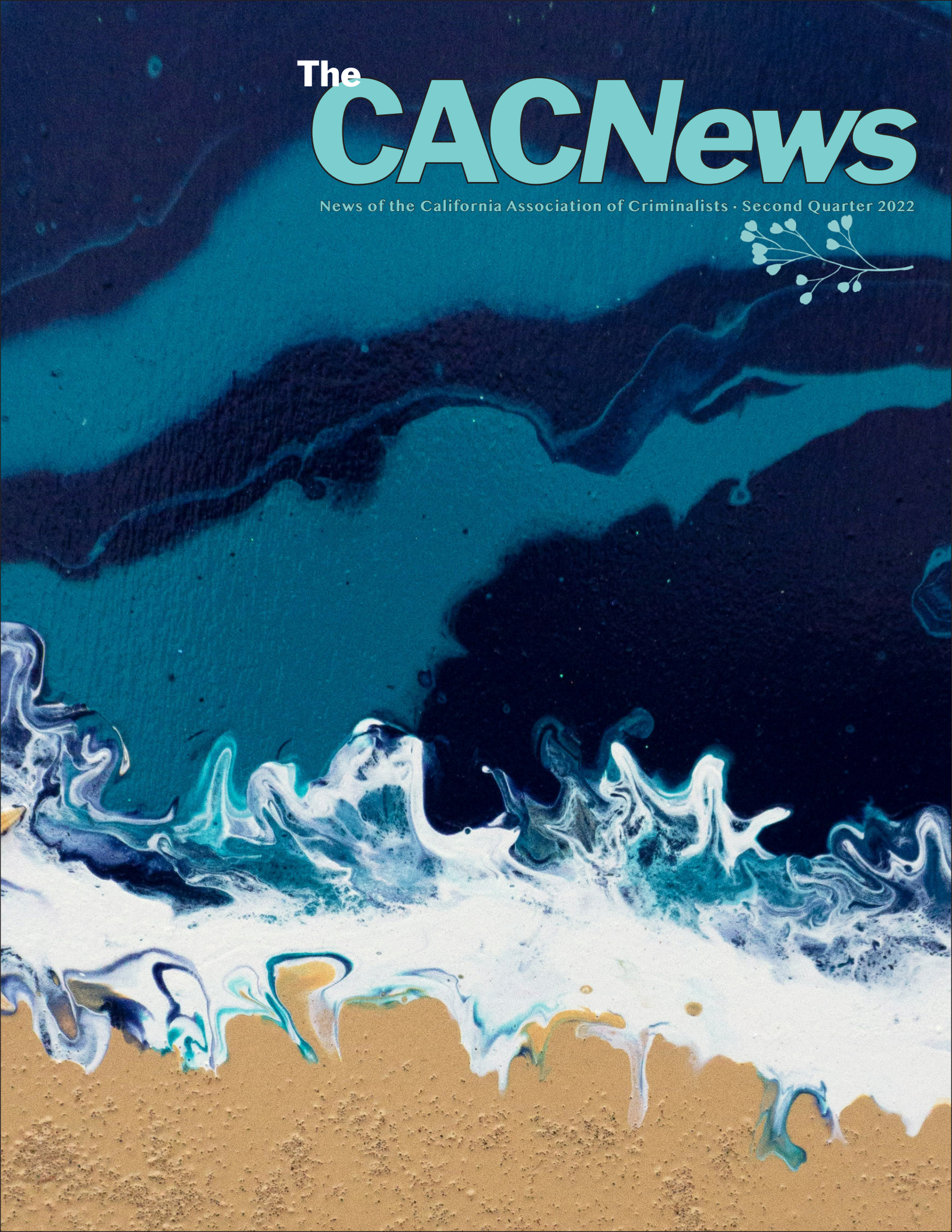


The **CACNews**

News of the California Association of Criminalists • Second Quarter 2022



The President's Desk

Catherine Currier



CAC President

*“Even if we get weary of the day-to-day trivial details, we must not forget the **value** of what we do. ”*

A Wild, Yet Rewarding Ride



President Catherine Currier with CAC members at the Fall Seminar Banquet.

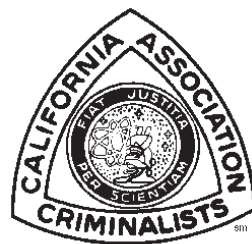
Greetings my fellow CAC members! This is my final President's Message, and I think, “Are there any words I can impart that will be beneficial?” I don't pretend to know everything, but as my term ends, I have this unique opportunity to reflect on the past year. From summer to the fall Delta surge, an in-person CAC conference in the fall, the winter Omicron surge, and now to loosening indoor mask restrictions, we have seen the ups and downs of this pandemic. And through it all, we have had one constant: our very important careers. Sometimes it's difficult to see our place in the justice system when there is such a huge backlog in every discipline, and the workload is consistently ever present. But sometimes if we look up, we can see that our work provides investigative leads, or confirms identities, and eventually provides a bit of closure to the families of the victims we serve. Even if we get weary of the day-to-day trivial details, we must not forget the value of what we do. A year and a half ago, I lost a very dear friend, a fellow Criminalist, who passed away at a very young age. He was such a passionate Criminalist, and he wanted to instill that passion in others for the work that we do. I think of him quite often, and I ask myself, am I doing all that I can? Am I thinking of all the possibilities? Am I asking the right questions? Whatever discipline you are in, my hope for you all is that you ask these questions in every case you are assigned.

Not only should we remember the value of what we do, we must also have a support system to help us continue to do what we do. This work that we do can be difficult. I've been working for the Sacramento DA's Office for the past 5 years now, and I have had the luxury of not having to go to crime scenes. Although I miss the comradery of the crime scene team, I am glad I don't have to see all the horrible things that people can do to each other. Even so, I realize there



A break from casework: Jenga with friends in the Fall Seminar Hospitality Suite.

cont'd on page 4



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On the cover:

Art by our members.
The ocean-themed
centerpieces at the Fall
Seminar Banquet were made
by Megan Caulder and
Jaime Baxter. A close-up
view shows the artistic
details portraying waves
crashing on a sandy shore.

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The deadlines for submissions are: December 1, March 1, June 1 and September 1.

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The President's Desk

"Being around people again, it reminded me of how I enjoy talking to people and learning about them. It was just what I needed to recharge."



Currier approaches the podium, recharged and ready to address the banquet attendees.

is some trauma that is inflicted upon us from some of our most difficult crime scenes. I was incredibly lucky to have a group of Criminalists that I could talk to, who understood what I was feeling, who could empathize, and yet remind me why we do what we do. I had family and friends who understood that sometimes I needed space to process, and people who reminded me to find peace and solace in meditation or activities. Whatever it is you need, make sure you find the people and resources to support you in any way you can. To do what we do, we must take care of ourselves, mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Our in-person conference that was held in October was also especially healing for me. Why, you ask? Because I was able to be around people and network, make new friends, and re-establish old friendships. We (the Board and the Seminar Planning Committee) were very careful, as we were still in the pandemic. We still wore masks indoors and ensured that all attendees were vaccinated. Having those safety protocols in place allowed me to relax and feel comfortable meeting new people. Being around people again, it reminded me of how I enjoy talking to people and learning about them. It was just what I needed to recharge. Now for this upcoming Seminar that will be held April 11-15 in Long Beach, we are not requiring attendees, vendors, and speakers to show proof of vaccination; however, we will require everyone to sign a COVID-19 waiver. In this way, we are hoping more people will attend, since we are now entering the endemic stage.

California has a plan to deal with COVID-19 as we begin to enter the endemic stage, the first state to release such a plan. California is a state that always takes the lead in many areas, as evidenced by the endemic plan. And we are an organization that strives to share new groundbreaking research in Criminalistics. So, for anyone who has conducted research or completed a really interesting case, but haven't shared it publicly, please consider sending in an abstract for upcoming Seminars!

It's been a wild ride serving as your President, but it has been rewarding! Your Board of Directors have helped me immensely to navigate this term, and you members should know you have a hard-working and talented Board that are working to ensure that our organization is the best it can be. I feel so very lucky to have been a part of this Board. I hope you all will consider becoming more actively involved! Not only will it expand your horizons and get you out of your comfort zone, but you will form new friendships. I just want to thank you, our members, for the opportunity to serve you. It has been an immense pleasure, and I wish you all the best as you continue in your careers.

Be safe,

Currier

Jonathan Charron



CAC Editorial Secretary

*“These
conversations
and interactions
reminded me of how
lucky we are to be
in the careers that
we chose”*

Renewal and Inspiration

Happy spring! As the days get warmer and the sky gets a little more blue, a sense of renewal is all around us. As criminalists, we can often get bogged down in the day-to-day stresses of our careers as the casework, deadlines, midnight crime scene calls, and court testimonies keep rolling in. When I start to get too deep, I like to step back and look for inspiration in those that are just starting their careers in this field and to those who have already forged a sturdy path forward for me to follow.

At the last conference in October, I was excited to be able to meet many new members of our organization and chat about the roads they have traveled to get into their career. I was also lucky to speak with a few students who are taking their first steps to secure a position at a lab. The thing that I noticed they all had in common was their drive and passion for gaining knowledge, opportunity, and experience. They had all made great effort to be at the conference and engaged with so many of us who were once in their shoes. These conversations and interactions reminded me of how lucky we are to be in the careers that we chose, and I reflected on how many people our work impacts. I needed that reminder of where I came from. While I would not like to go back to the world of college exams, endless job posting searches, and interviews, I do want to retain that drive and passion I had when I first started out.

I was also lucky to share a table or two with many members of our organization who have retired or are at the end of their careers. In some contrast to our newer members, the conversations I had with these established criminalists were often measured, reflective, and full of wisdom. These chats inspired me to strive to get to a place of confidence in my craft. Their experience provided them with a level of comfort and calm as we discussed the ever-changing world of forensic science.

While many of us are somewhere in the middle of these two milestones, it is nice to engage with those on a different place on that path. There are times that we need that youthful excitement to get us through our week and remind us how lucky we are to be in such an impactful career, and then there are times we need that comfort from someone who has already walked the path we are on to tell us we are headed in the right direction. My respect and appreciation for everyone on our path is immense, so thank you all for the amazing work that you do.

In line with this appreciation, you may have noticed that the CACNews has been featuring many members and their experiences. In this issue, I am sharing with you an amazing piece written about one of our long standing members, and newly appointed Life Member, Gregory Laskowski. I hope that you take the time to read this article written by Steven Mayer of the Bakersfield Californian and get to learn about Gregory’s journey through his career.

If you know of any amazing articles or work that our members are involved in, please reach out to me at editor@cacnews.org. The accomplishments of our members are something we should all celebrate as it strengthens our organization and forensic science community. I hope you have a great spring, and for those of you attending the conference in April, be sure to share a table with some new people, both new and established.



Veteran criminalist, forensic investigator Greg Laskowski was CSI before CSI was cool

By STEVEN MAYER smayer@bakersfield.com Jan 2, 2022

Gregory Laskowski has spent a career — actually multiple careers — as a criminalist and forensic investigator, university instructor, and as the entrepreneur owner of his own business in crime scene investigation, shooting scene reconstruction, blood spatter analysis, arson and explosives analysis and more.



Laskowski stands with numerous plaques and certificates commemorating his accomplished career as a criminalist.

The job description may sound more than a little macabre, and it's certainly not a career for just anyone, but for Laskowski, his work was a search for the truth, and ultimately, a search for justice.

And sometimes it was fun, too.

When CSI — crime scene investigation — became all the rage on TV crime dramas, Laskowski worked for years as a technical consultant for such television series as "CSI-Crime Scene Investigations," "CSI: Miami," "Law and Order" and many others.

But now, after decades of meticulous work that earned the respect of judges, district attorneys, cops and jurors, the 66-year-old is finally putting away his microscopes and preparing for retirement.

"I first met Mr. Laskowski when I began working as a prosecutor at the Kern County District Attorney's Office in 1984," current Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer said in an email.

Laskowski was already an accomplished criminalist at the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory and was highly respected by law enforcement,

prosecutors, defense attorneys and the bench, said Zimmer, who worked with the criminalist on nearly every kind of case, from DUIs to homicides.

"He was an expert in many areas," Zimmer said, "including blood spatter evidence, shoe track analysis and firearms examination."

Laskowski, she said, "was meticulous in his analysis and drew his conclusions based on science, as he was careful to never favor any side in the litigation."

Born in Schenectady, N.Y., in 1955, Laskowski came to Bakersfield two years later when his father landed a job with Standard Oil's exploration division in 1957.

"I was pretty much raised in Bakersfield," Laskowski said.

He studied biochemistry at the University of Southern California, and went to work at the Kern County Sheriff's Office's Criminalistics Laboratory in 1977.

It was the beginning of a career path that would last some 45 years.



Laskowski in an episode of Forensic Files, "A Leg Up on Crime", analyzing footwear impression evidence.

In 1987, when the crime lab came under the supervision of the Kern County District Attorney's Office, the transformation was almost seamless.

"There was no change in personnel," he remembered. "Just a change in bosses."

The first time Laskowski was ordered to go out to a crime scene investigation — he called it a "baptism of fire" — it was like a graduation to another level.

"I remember walking into that crime scene, and I remember the old detectives. They looked at me," he said. "And I could hear them whispering, 'Here comes the college boy.'"

Laskowski considers himself fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity to cross train in so many different sub-specialties at the lab.

"When I started, I did toxicology, drug analysis, blood alcohol analysis for drunk driving cases," he said. "I went on to work arson cases and firearms and tool marks. It afforded me the opportunity to learn all these things."

Laskowski calls himself a dinosaur because these days, criminalists usually must specialize in one or two areas. But Laskowski continued to expand his areas of expertise throughout his career.



Laskowski presenting "An Unusual Toolmark and Fracture Match to a Smokestack from a 19th Century Steam Engine" at the Association of Firearm and Tool Mark Examiners 2012 Training Seminar.

"He was the consummate expert witness," recalled retired Kern County Superior Court Judge James M. Stuart.

Laskowski was "always well-prepared," Stuart said, "and his demeanor was the same whether

answering questions from the prosecution or the defense."

The so-called dinosaur would end up working as the supervising criminalist in Bakersfield, where he supervised the Major Crimes Unit.



Laskowski receives the CAC Spring 2012 Alfred A. Biasotti Most Outstanding Presentation Award for his presentation "An Unusual Tool Mark/Fracture Mark Case".

He would work on some of Kern County's biggest criminal cases, from David Keith Rogers, a Kern County sheriff's deputy convicted of murdering a woman and a teenage girl, to Bruce Sons, who was convicted in 2006 of voluntary manslaughter in the 1994 shooting death of California Highway Patrol Officer Richard Maxwell.

In 1999 or 2000, Laskowski was recruited as a technical adviser by actor David Berman, who played assistant coroner David Phillips on the hit TV series, "CSI-Crime Scene Investigations."

Berman and Jon Wellner, who played toxicologist Henry Andrews, were also researchers and consultants for the show. In an earlier Californian interview, Berman said he discovered Laskowski when he was searching for a firearms expert to help develop a plot. Recommended by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in Colorado, the Kern County criminologist became one of the show's most valued consultants.

A few years later, the TV crime drama saved the Kern County crime lab, said Laskowski.

There had been a big push in 2005 to cut funding to the lab, but when members of the show's cast visited the crime lab, their enthusiastic support seemed to convince Kern County supervisors to drop plans to take an ax to the lab's budget.



Laskowski and fellow criminalists at the CAC Spring 2012 Seminar.

Laskowski served as a technical consultant, helping develop plot lines and solutions to the crime of the week.

"They were always sending me scripts," he said. "They always wanted these perfect murders. It kept my mind really active.

"I had to debunk the idea of using a frozen meat bullet," he said. "It won't work."

But in the end, Laskowski believes the popularity of the shows raised the profile of those who do the work of the criminalist.

"He knew it could really elevate the status of forensic scientists," Berman told *The Californian* in 2015.

But in real courtrooms, he may not have needed any help.

Reached Thursday while traveling, Kern County Superior Court Judge Michael Lewis said Laskowski was considered quite competent by the legal community, and that his analysis was crucial in a number of major cases in Kern County.

"One case that comes to mind was his testimony in the case of Rodney Berryman, a death penalty case prosecuted by (former District Attorney) Lisa Green," Lewis said in a text message. "His forensic analysis was instrumental in connecting the defendant to the case."

Laskowski's demeanor was also critical.

"Besides his analysis," Lewis said, "the jurors all seemed to like the manner in which he presented his findings. He came across as credible and understated in his testimony."

The criminalist taught a CSI course for the Levan Institute for Lifelong Learning at Bakersfield College and was an adjunct professor at the University of Oklahoma.

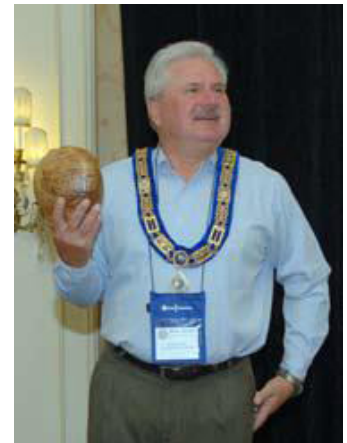
He retired from the crime lab in 2012, but continued to work cases as a consultant through his private firm, Criminalistics Services International LLC.

He remained active in a number of professional organizations, including the California Association of Criminalists, the American Board of Criminalistics and the International Association for Identification.

"As DNA techniques continued to improve, cold case homicides were solved, which required the testimony of witnesses who worked on the cases many years ago," Zimmer told *The Californian*.

"For decades, Mr. Laskowski responded to murder scenes and helped analyze the evidence," she said.

"Since becoming the district attorney, I tried a cold case homicide from 20 years prior and had the pleasure of calling Mr. Laskowski as a witness, years after he retired from the crime lab. As always, he was prepared and sharp on the witness stand, as if the incident had happened a few days before."



Laskowski with the presidential sash and coconut, serving as CAC President in 2014.

Photos courtesy of Gregory Laskowski.

Visit [The Bakersfield Californian](#) to view the original article.



2022 CAC Board Nominations



Sheltri Gresham for President Elect

I am both thrilled and honored to be nominated for the position of CAC President-Elect. I started my career as a criminalist for the California Department of Justice in May of 2001 and became a member of CAC in 2003. After attending my first Seminar, I knew this organization was something I wanted to be a part of. The knowledge and experience of CAC's members, as well as the camaraderie they shared, was an inspiration to me and has continued to be a great influence on my professional career.

After attending several more CAC Seminars, I joined the Financial Review Committee in 2006. Being a committee member not only gave me insight into the inner workings of the CAC, but it also showed me the depth to which CAC supports its members. I continued working with the Financial Review Committee between 2006 and 2009. During this time I also helped co-host my first seminar with the Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory in the fall of 2007. It was so much fun and felt like such a huge personal accomplishment that I jumped at the opportunity to help the Central Valley Criminalistics Laboratory co-host the Fall 2013 Seminar. In 2018, I gladly accepted the position of Seminar Planning Committee Chairperson, and as Chairperson I advocated for the change from a semi-annual seminar schedule to an annual seminar schedule. I feel this change will greatly benefit the CAC, its members, and the forensic community as a whole.

I have enjoyed serving the CAC in a variety of capacities over the past nineteen years, and I hope to continue serving the CAC as President-Elect. Thank you for your support and consideration.



Stephanie James for Regional Director North

I'm currently a criminalist in the Biology Section of the Sacramento County DA Laboratory of Forensic Services. I've been at this laboratory for almost 10 years, but I started my career at the CA DOJ Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory in 2002. Over the last twenty years, I've had the opportunity to work in every section of DNA testing possible: Databank, Casework, and Missing Persons. I might be a bit partial to DNA, but working at a full-service laboratory has given me an appreciation for how all areas of forensics are vital to solving crime. I'm also currently a Professional Development Coordinator for the laboratory which allows me to share my love of this job with student interns who are wide-eyed and just starting out, eager to get into our field. I started attending CAC meetings early in my career as a great way to keep abreast of new changes and technologies and keep in touch with my old colleagues and friends. I'd be honored to help this organization be the best it can be as your Regional Director North.



2022 CAC Board Nominations



Megan Caulder for Membership Secretary

It is an honor to be nominated for the CAC board position of Membership Secretary. I am currently employed by the California Department of Justice Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory. I started at CAL-DOJ as a Criminalist in 2009 working in the Databank section. In 2014 I promoted to Senior Criminalist and also started working in the Biology/DNA Casework section. I am the alternate CODIS administrator for my laboratory and hold certification in Molecular Biology by the American Board of Criminalistics.

I first joined the CAC in 2005 as a Student Affiliate member while working on my master's degree in forensic science at UC Davis and later gave a presentation on my thesis research at a DNA workshop. I eventually became a Full member in 2011 and served as the Northern DNA Study Group Chairperson from 2013 to 2016. I have attended many CAC workshops, seminars, and study group meetings over the years. Recently I had the opportunity to serve on the planning committee for the October 2021 CAC Seminar, which was one of the most fun and rewarding experiences that I have had as a CAC member! I truly value my involvement in the CAC as it offers a way to communicate and collaborate amongst colleagues about current forensic technologies, issues, and cases.

I have had the pleasure of serving the CAC as Membership Secretary since 2016 and would be thrilled to contribute to the Board of Directors in this role for another term. Thank you for your consideration for the position of Membership Secretary.



Günther Scharnhorst for Recording Secretary

I am a senior criminalist working for the California Department of Justice at the Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory in Richmond. I hold a certification in Molecular Biology by the American Board of Criminalistics.

My coworkers and I in the Method Development unit test and validate new protocols and technologies in DNA analysis for the Bureau of Forensic Services. Many of my projects revolve around automation which is why I will stop and correct people who say children are our future. No. Robots are our future.

I have been a member of the CAC since 2008 and have had the pleasure of serving on the Board of Directors as your Recording Secretary since 2016. It would be an honor to continue to do so and I would greatly appreciate your support for another term as your Recording Secretary. Thank you.

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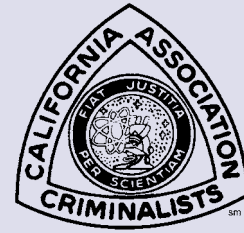


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