

Crimestoppers tip reported burned body. First killing of 2008

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From staff reports

A Crimestoppers tip Thursday morning led New Orleans police to an abandoned public school building in the Lower 9th Ward where they discovered the burned body of the city's first homicide victim of 2008, the coroner's office said.

The man had been fatally shot in the head. He was still unidentified Thursday night, but his body bore six tattoos that coroner's investigators believe will help them discover who he is, said John Gagliano, chief investigator for the Orleans Parish coroner's office.

An anonymous tipster called Crimestoppers shortly before 8 a.m. and reported that a man's body could be found inside Alfred Lawless High School, 5300 Law St., said Darlene Cusanza, executive director of Crimestoppers.

Fifth District police were immediately notified and found the burned body in a second-floor classroom, Gagliano and Cusanza said.

Cusanza said because of Crimestoppers confidentiality rules, she could not disclose the circumstances under which the anonymous tipster learned the body was in the school.

A pathologist for the coroner's office who performed the autopsy Thursday said the man died from gunshot wounds to his head, and that his body had been burned after he died.

Gagliano said investigators believe the body was burned in an attempt to cover the wounds which were apparent only after an autopsy.

The wounds led to the classification of the death as a homicide.

The pathologist believes the man was killed elsewhere within 24 hours of the body's discovery, and taken to the school, which was not boarded up and was easily accessible, Gagliano said.

The man was estimated to be between 20 and 25 years old, Gagliano said. He was about 5-foot-4-inches tall, weighed 135 pounds, and had black hair with twists.

He sported these tattoos:

- The name "Mary" on the left side of his chest.
- The word "Bounce" on the outside of his right forearm, from wrist to elbow.
- The word "Back" on the outside of his left forearm.
- The name "Terrell" on the inside of his left forearm.
- The initials "D.R." below the Terrell tattoo.
- The letters "RIP" on the inside of his right forearm.

The death is the first homicide in 2008, said NOPD spokeswoman Officer Shereese Harper. There were 209 homicides in the city in 2007.