



# 2020 Annual Report

Kane County Coroner's Office  
Rob Russell, Coroner

719 South Batavia Avenue, Building E  
Geneva, IL 60134



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## Office of Coroner – “Custos Placitorum Coronae”

*The title, “coroner,” is from the Latin word for crown, “corona,” dating back to the reign of King Richard the Lionheart in 1194.*

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Before they were known as coroners, people from the community were selected to investigate deaths. The office of coroner was officially established in England in 1194. Appointed by the crown, coroners were to investigate violent, unexplained deaths, assuring that any property left behind by the deceased was added to the storehouse of the King of England. Thus, the title, “coroner,” from the Latin word for crown, “corona.” Coroners were tasked to “keep the pleas of the crown.”

An Eyre, a circuit court held in medieval England by an itinerant judge travelling from county to county, was held in the County of Kent in September of 1194, during the reign of King Richard the Lionheart. The 1194 “Articles of Eyre,” the statutory basis for the coroner, stated that, “...in every county of the king’s realm shall be elected three knights and one clerk, to keep the pleas of the crown.” At that time, coroners had to be knights and men of substance. Their appointment depended on a certain property level, wishing to reduce temptation for coroners to follow the sheriff’s existing habit of embezzlement. Coroners were unpaid, the assumption being that if only well-to-do knights were coroners, they would have no need of further wealth. It was a serious offense to receive a reward (bribe) for their duties. The qualification of coroner was eventually expanded to include, “...to be knights or of the most lawful men of the county.”



Determining the cause of deaths would also be important in the New World. It is believed that William Penn appointed one of the first coroners in the American colonies in 1682. In, “Frame of Government of Pennsylvania, by William Penn,” Penn outlined the need for a coroner, “... I, *William Penn*, do therefore think fit to nominate and appoint such persons for judges, treasurers, masters of the rolls, sheriffs, justices of the peace, and coroners, as are most fitly qualified for those employments...” At the time, coroners were appointed to life time service.

Early American coroners, like their English counterparts, relied mainly on common sense, since most did not have a medical background. The only requirement for a coroner was proof that he was not an ex-convict! As the country grew, coroners were elected for all of the original 13 colonies. As more new states and territories developed, coroners were elected as county officers, comparable to sheriffs, with whom they often traded places.

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*Outlined in, “Frame of Government of Pennsylvania,” by William Penn, the first official coroner in the New World was appointed in 1682.*

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## A Message from the Coroner

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The Office of Coroner is a very important institution in the law enforcement arm. Although coroners hire doctors to perform medical tests and autopsies, the office itself is not a medical agency. The coroner's office is a law enforcement agency. Contrary to widespread belief, a coroner need not be a physician. Coroners come from many other professions, including police and fire agencies, or the funeral industry. The county coroner is an administrator who oversees the scientific process of determining a death, otherwise known as a medicolegal death investigation. The coroner guides this death investigation and authorizes the appropriate county resources needed to perform the statutory duties.



The primary role of coroner is to determine the cause and manner of a death. Coroners collaborate with police and fire agencies on the scene, review medical histories from primary care physicians, interview family and friends, and order any additional forensic tests to help answer the following questions surrounding a death: **who** (positive ID), **what, where, when and how**. Once these questions have been answered, a final cause and manner can be determined. Sometimes this investigative process is quick and easy; other times it is time consuming and difficult. The resources needed for each case are directly proportional to the level of difficulty. Budgeting the resources needed to properly complete our duties is an educated estimate based on industry knowledge and past trends.

The year 2020 has been a unique experience. New terminologies and phrases such as 'unprecedented times', 'flatten the curve', and 'social distancing' will forever be imprinted in our minds. If someone would have told me in 2015 that one **MUST** wear a face covering to a bank in order to get service, I would not have believed it. The Kane County Coroner's Office (KCCO) personnel were at ground zero, daily, during the pandemic. While other professions were able to stay home, we were one of the few professions that could not remote in to work via zoom. We had to come to work, and on many occasions, go out to scenes where the virus was present. **For the first time in Kane County history, the office processed over 4,000 death investigations. That is almost a 25% increase in one year!** To add insult to injury, **Opioid deaths increased by 16% in 2020**. Through these issues, and many others, the Kane County Coroner's Office (KCCO) continued to operate with excellence and compassion.

In the following pages, I hope you will agree that the information provided validates the professionalism that we strive to achieve every day. I believe this report will open most people's eyes to how well the staff at the Kane County Coroner's Office carry out their duties. Our motto, "Honor, Truth and Service," coupled with compassion, are the bedrock principles of what we do.

It is an honor to serve as your Coroner. If you have any comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at 630-232-3535.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

L. Robert Russell  
Kane County Coroner

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# *Kane County Coroner's Office*

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## *Mission*

To provide professional medicolegal death investigation by:

- Determining cause and manner of death
- Identifying decedent
- Notifying next-of-kin
- Protecting decedent's property
- Assisting survivors of the deceased with advocacy group referrals when appropriate

## *Vision*

To be the leader in providing compassionate, respectful, and efficient service to the people we serve in accomplishing our mission statement.

## *Purpose*

The Kane County Coroner's Office is a statutory law enforcement agency operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. It is our goal to maintain full investigative and supportive services, while complying with the law and dealing with rising population growth, increasing caseloads, growing diversity, and complicated lifestyles.

The Coroner's Office investigates all unusual or suspicious deaths in Kane County while striving to maintain a high level of sensitivity to families of victims, assisting with professionalism in the preparation of the deceased for final disposition. The Coroner assures that the proper scientific testing is conducted to assist the law enforcement agencies and prosecutors. The Coroner's Office, under Illinois Statute, has the responsibility to inform the public of any and all issues that present a death risk, and also provides educational programs to address preventable death.

## *Illinois State Statutes*

The duties of the Coroner are outlined in the **Illinois Code 55 ILCS 5/3-3001-3045** and the state mandates what the Coroner does and how the Office executes its duties. From swearing in coroner deputies to reporting specific kinds of death to performing mandatory autopsies, the Kane County Coroner's Office dutifully operates within these state-required parameters.

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## *Honor, Veritas, Servitium*

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**The Kane County Coroner’s seal communicates the history and integrity of the office.** Center on the image is a knight kneeling at a headstone, harkening back to the first coroners who were in service to the crown. Sunrays shining over the scene, which could be from a sunrise or a sunset, represent the Coroner’s duties, spanning all hours of all days.

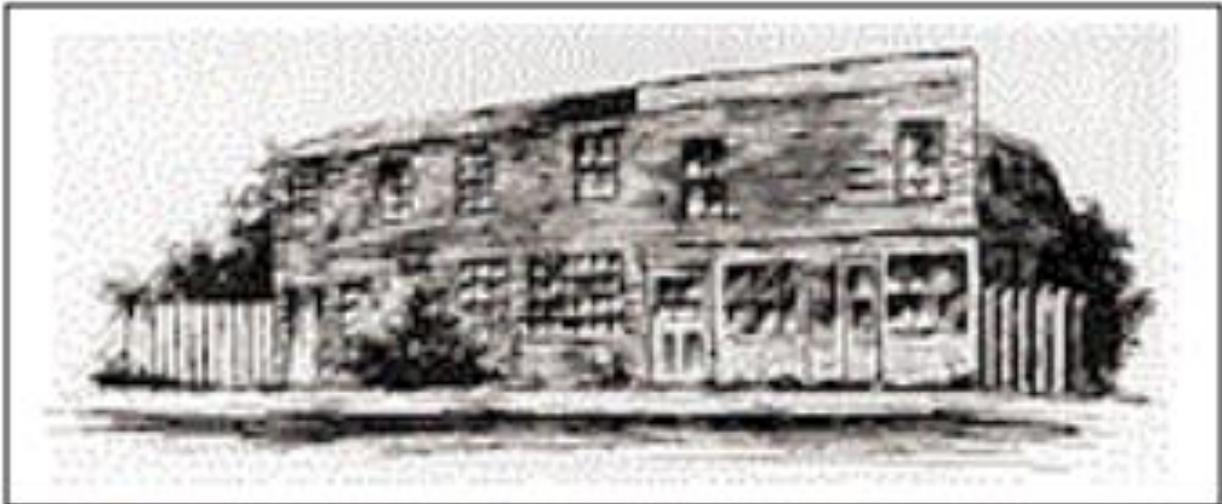
Along with, “The Office of Kane County Coroner,” the Latin words for honor, truth, and service, “Honor, Veritas, Servitium,” signify the importance of those values to the office of Coroner.

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## *Origin of the Coroner’s Office in Kane County*

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First elected in 2012, Rob Russell is the thirtieth person to hold the Office of Coroner, an elected position in Kane County for 185 years.



The first Coroner was elected on June 4, 1836, at Jim Harrington’s Tavern & Inn, now the site of The Harrington Inn, Geneva, which then served as the County Courthouse. On that day, 180 men gathered to elect officials for the new County: three commissioners, a Sheriff, a Recorder of Deeds, a Coroner, and a Surveyor.

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# *Kane County Coroner's Office Team*

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## *Kane County Coroner*

L. Robert (Rob) Russell

### *Full Time Staff:*

#### *Chief Deputy Coroner*

Loren Carrera

#### *Assistant Chief Deputy/FOIA Officer*

Karen Herout

#### *Administrative Assistants*

Hollie Burlack

Carol McKellar

#### *Deputy Coroners*

Lisa Kriegbaum

Derick Hayden

Steve Laker

Gabriela Allison

Carl Herout

Rachel Hall

### *On Call Staff:*

(These are contracted, on call, or volunteer positions that are not full-time employees, thus saving the county/taxpayers valuable resources.)

#### *Forensic Pathologists*

Mitra Kalelkar, M.D.

Dr. Kalelkar is a Board-Certified Forensic Pathologist with over four decades of experience in forensic pathology. She retired from Cook County as the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner and Co-Director of the Residency Training Program. She was an Associate Professor of Pathology at the University of Illinois until her retirement. After having served Cook County for over 30 years, Dr. Kalelkar continues to work part-time as a coroner's pathologist dedicated to Kane and DeKalb Counties. She has performed several thousand autopsies and testified as an expert witness hundreds of times in both civil and criminal cases.

James Filkins, M.D., J.D.

Physician and attorney, one of the few forensic pathologists who has also litigated cases in court involving wrongful deaths. As a forensic pathologist with the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office he performed several thousand autopsies and has testified as an expert witness in forensic pathology over 300 times. He continues to work as a part-time coroner's pathologist for the DuPage, Kane, DeKalb, Kankakee, and Iroquois County Coroners' Offices and as an expert consultant in forensic pathology.

#### *Forensic Odontology*

Denise C. Murmann, D.D.S., D-A.B.F.O.

#### *Forensic Anthropology*

Erin Waxenbaum, Ph.D, D-ABFA

#### *Forensic Entomology*

Neal Haskell, Ph.D.

#### *Ophthalmology Pathology*

Richard J. Grostern, M.D.

#### *Toxicology*

NMS Labs

#### *Histology*

Tissue Techniques Pathology Labs

#### *Chaplain*

Rev. Tim Perry,

President, Nationwide Chaplain Services

Providing specialized services to emergency responder professionals, their families, and ultimately the community.

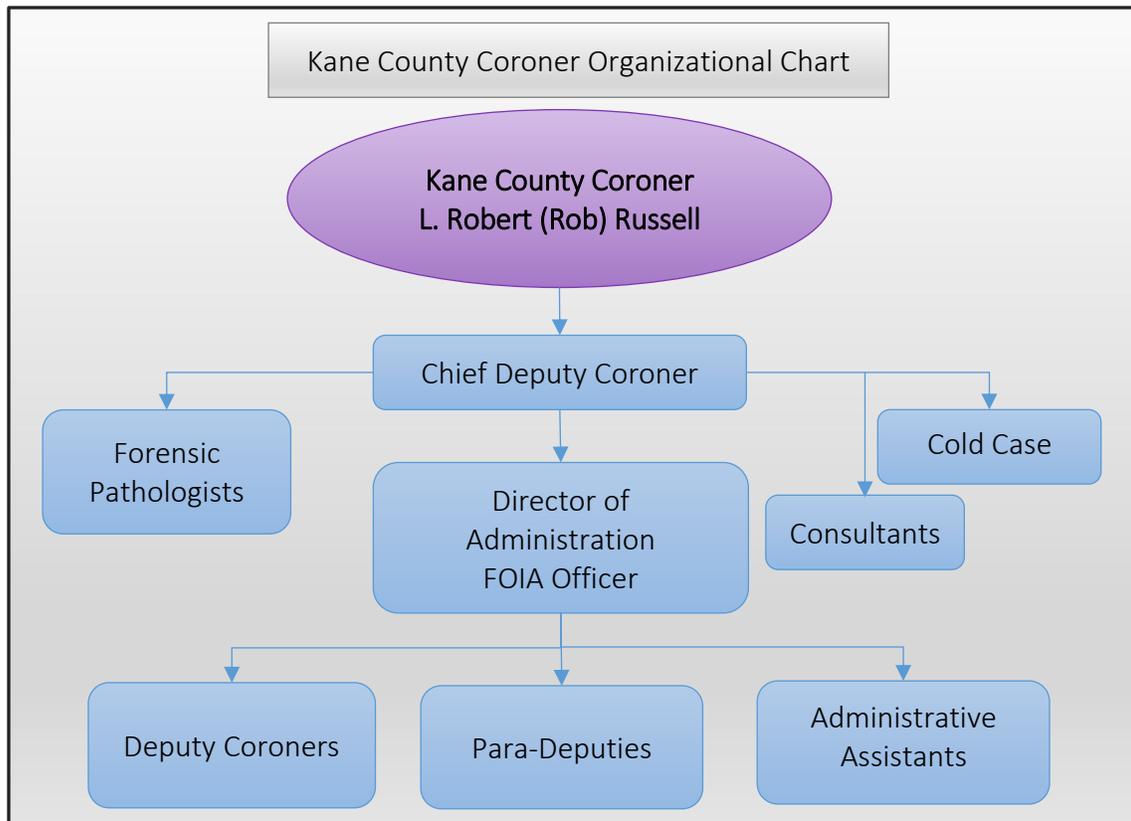
**Staff has immediate access to professionals skilled with working in a group or a one on one setting as needed.**

Employees learn about stress reactions and symptoms, acquire skills and resources to assist with the healing process. This was a valuable resource to assist our staff with processing the 2019 Henry Pratt Company tragedy.

#### *Cold Case Unit*

Maureen E. Kelly, J.D., Investigator

Gabriela Allison, Investigator



## *On Duty 24/7/365*

Deputies continued rotating 12 hour shifts in 2020. Previously, all deputies worked 8-hour shifts, 8:30 am-4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. They were called out for after-hours calls as needed. Deputies were frequently called in while off duty to cover calls during evenings, overnights, weekends, and holiday hours. After-hour call outs were inefficient for the office budget, as well as problematic for the deputies' morale. They were never fully considered "off-duty." This unpredictable schedule made it difficult for staff to physically recharge, while properly coping with the difficult subject matter of death investigation.

Because the work of the Kane County Coroner's Office is 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, Coroner Russell generated a schedule that spread out the hours equally amongst the deputies. In essence, all calls are handled within the assigned duty time, with an on-duty deputy 24 hours a day, in 12-hour increments, throughout the year. **A KCCO deputy is in the office 24/7/365**, virtually eliminating the need for after-hours calls. Deputies are actually off duty when not scheduled and can better plan their personal time. It is a very rare event when a deputy is called in to work while off duty. The rare exception was when all deputies were called in to respond to the February 15, 2019, tragic mass shooting at the Henry Pratt Company in Aurora, where six lives were lost.

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# The Process of a Case

## Understanding Death Investigation

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The coroner's office is a **law enforcement agency**. Typically, we are called by the police jurisdiction where the body is located but sometimes fire agencies, hospitals, and funeral homes will call us. There are two key words in determining a coroner's case. Those words are **suspicious** and/or **sudden**. If the death is suspicious or sudden, it will most likely be a coroner's case. It is important to point out that under most states, including Illinois, only two people have the authority to finalize a death certificate: a licensed physician or the county coroner.



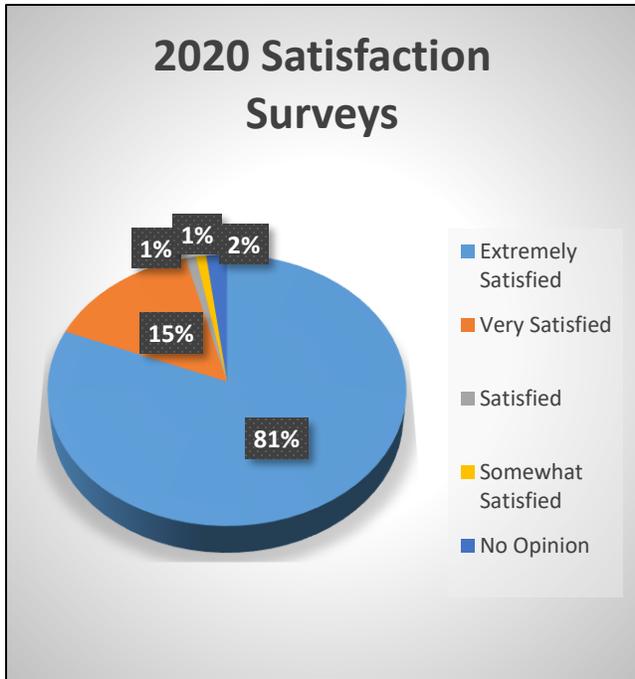
Once the coroner's office is made aware of the death, the assigned investigator begins to ask the important questions:

**who, what, why, when, and how**. The absence of answers to those questions, coupled with the level of suspiciousness, guides the investigator's next steps. Some decedents have an extensive documented medical history. If that is the case, the investigator may be able to make contact with the decedent's physician and discuss the circumstances of the death. If the physician has no concerns, believes the death is due to the medical issues, and is willing to complete and sign a death certificate, the case is referred to the physician for completion. This type of case is called a **Return To Medical (RTM)** for obvious reasons. These are almost always **Natural Deaths**. If the physician does not feel comfortable completing the death certificate, it is the responsibility of the coroner's investigator to complete the certificate so that the coroner can sign it. By ordering and reviewing medical records and questioning witnesses in a relatively expedient manner, the case can be solved by the coroner via the investigator. If the death investigation yields all the relevant information needed to answer the important questions, the coroner will review the report and sign the death certificate. This type of case is appropriately called a **Sign Out (SO)**.

The last and most complex type of coroner's case is called a **Sign Out Unnatural (SOU)**. The SOU case typically requires the most resources to investigate properly. Examples of SOUs include, but are not limited to, all **Homicides, Accidental Deaths, and Suicides**. The resources for these complex cases most likely require autopsy, toxicology, specific testing, histology, as well as hours, days, weeks and even months of investigation time.

This is a brief outline of how the process works, but it is important to point out that, **although there are recognizable patterns in certain types of deaths, every case is different and exceptions do exist**. Cases can morph from one type of case into another and back, and have done so on several occasions.

## How are we doing?



Why did we implement the **Satisfaction Survey**?  
To find out how we are doing, from the people we serve.

With this satisfaction survey, families have the opportunity to evaluate the professionalism, compassion, and attitude of our employees, ask questions, or voice concerns, with the option of remaining anonymous. The surveys not only represent a snapshot of the office, but may also reveal areas for improvement.

The Kane County Coroner's Office Satisfaction Survey, consisting of seven questions and a comment section, are sent to families of all Sign Out Unnatural (SOU) deaths and any SO (Sign Out) natural deaths where we ran toxicology or performed an autopsy. To better understand SOU and SO, see page 7.

### Some of the comments from those families we served in 2020:

Do you have any other comments, questions or concerns regarding any Kane County personnel that you interacted with?

*Very respectful, answered all questions in a professional manner.*

*The coroner staff was always very helpful in answering our questions and keeping my daughter & I informed.*

*Really helped us through a very hard time.*

*Thank You So Much*

*I Truly appreciated that when I had concerns about my son's information being leaked I was listened to and my concerns were addressed. Whenever I had questions I wasn't rushed and they were all answered. My son was more than a body to them. They looked at him for what he was my son.*

## From Those We Serve

More comments that family members included in their satisfaction survey:

Beyond professional, the Asst Coroner was personal, empathetic, caring and sensitive both at the scene and over the phone once the cause of death was determined. Please thank her again for us.

Thank you for your followthrough and help.

Thank you for your kindness & professionalism during a very tough time for my family.

I appreciate the care & concern of your office. This was a difficult time for us, our questions were answered or anticipated. Very professional and, I felt compassionate service. Sorry to be so late in answering this. It got mixed in with papers we just now are sorting through.

Thank you all, for what you do everyday! ♥

Thanks for everything!!

very nice and answered all my questions. He helped make my father's death a little less stressful and made me feel he was in good hands while waiting on Autopsy results. Tell him thank you very much for everything

Very smooth process. Very respectful and professional handling, sympathetic and concerning. Thank you!!

Such a caring and professional team. I appreciate their proactivity and respect.

Kane County personnel, law enforcement, etc. were ~~absolutely~~ absolutely amazing. They were extremely professional yet empathetic and showed compassion. They answered all of my questions and made a very difficult situation proceed as smooth as possible. I will keep you all in my prayers. Thank you for being such stellar genuine people.

All Coroner Files/Forms/Deputy Survey - Rev. 4/24/2020

# Re-Accreditation: KCCO Leading the Way

Meeting 100% of All Standards Set Forth by the IACME



## International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners



**International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners**  
*Professionalism & Prevention*  
Dedicated to the promotion of excellence in medicolegal death investigation through  
annual educational seminars for over 70 years

August 24, 2020

Kane County Coroner's Office  
Coroner Rob Russell  
719 S. Batavia Ave, Bldg E  
Geneva, IL 60134

Ref: International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners Accreditation

Dear Coroner Russell,

As the Chairman of the Board and Secretary of the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) and on behalf of those members that we represent, I would like to congratulate you on your accreditation with our association.

The Accreditation Auditors made it clear the Kane County Coroner's Office makes every effort to provide the highest level of service to the citizens, neighbors and visitors of Kane County. This is accomplished by a dedicated team of well-trained investigators through timely and compassionate investigations of deaths occurring in their jurisdiction. They strive to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with local law enforcement as well as with local EMS providers. Kane County Coroner's Office also takes advantage of every opportunity to educate and to build trust within their medical community and they are the voice of those who can no longer speak for themselves.

The IACME is proud to say the Kane County Coroner's Office is a great representation of what our association expects from an accredited office. An Accreditation certificate to recognize this achievement will be mailed to your office. Thank you again for your support of the IACME.

Respectfully,

John Fudenberg, Accreditation Manager  
IAC&ME

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1704 PINTO LANE - LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89106 - (702) 455-3385



Scott Grim, D-ABMDI and IACME Lead Auditor, with Connie Jacobson, IACME Auditor, meet with Coroner Russell and Chief Deputy Loren Carrera while assessing the archives facility of the Coroner's Office at 719 S. Batavia Avenue in Geneva.

Coroner Russell began the KCCO accreditation process as soon as taking office in 2012. The lengthy and detailed procedure proved successful when the Kane County Coroner's Office became the **first Coroner's or Medical Examiner's Office in Illinois** presented with a five year "Certificate of Accreditation" by the IACME.



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## Re-Accreditation: KCCO Leading the Way

*Meeting 100% of All Standards Set Forth by the IACME*

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**Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic**, the Kane County Coroner's Office received re-accreditation from the International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners (IACME) scoring a **100% compliance to all standards**.

The IACME offers accreditation for offices of all sizes. This certification process provides coroner and medical examiner offices the opportunity to self-assess and subsequently have auditors trained by the association review all applicable standards, allowing medicolegal death investigation offices to ensure they are conducting business practices and procedures in compliance with **international standards**. The accreditation process also promotes and allows innovative ideas to be implemented quicker, while creating a **professional collaborative environment with police and fire departments, as well as with funeral homes**.

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*"Many are better than one. Accreditation brings legitimacy by voluntarily subjecting the policies and procedures of the office to scrutiny by industry experts." - Rob Russell, Coroner*

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*IACME Auditors meet with Coroner Russell and staff to discuss results of the 2020 Accreditation in the breakroom of the Coroner's Office at 719 S. Batavia Ave., in Geneva.*

*Clockwise starting on the left: Director of Training and Accreditation Jeff Christiansen, Assistant Chief Deputy/FOIA Officer Karen Herout, Coroner Rob Russell, IACME Auditor Connie Jacobson, IACME Lead Auditor Scott Grim, Chief Deputy Loren Carrera, Deputy Gabriella Allison, Deputy Rachel Hall, Administrative Assistant Hollie Burlack.*

*The International Association of Coroner's & Medical Examiners is, "Dedicated to the promotion of excellence in medicolegal death investigation through collaboration, education, and accreditation."*

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## Collaborating to Better Serve

*Working Together for the Citizens of Kane County*

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Collaboration to better serve Kane County was an immediate focus of Coroner Russell when taking office in 2012. Collaboration with other offices, agencies, and organizations was clearly recognized in 2014 when the KCCO received accreditation by the IACME. KCCO was the first Coroner's Office in Illinois to earn that distinction.



*"Everyone in the office goes above and beyond to make sure families are taken care of." -Phil Malone of Malone Funeral Home*

During the re-accreditation process in 2020, the IACME auditors invited three community partners: fellow law enforcement, a funeral director, and a representative from county government, to report on their experience working with the Kane County Coroner's Office.



*Sheriff Ron Hain posed with Coroner Russell and the IACME Auditors for a photo. Sheriff Hain commented that he and his staff have a great working partnership with the Coroner's Office.*



*Kane County Board Member Anita Lewis spoke very highly of Coroner Russell and the KCCO staff for the professionalism, care and respect they have for the families they work with.*

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## Collaborating to Inspire the Next Generation of Medicolegal Professionals

*"We have to train up the next generation." – Coroner Russell*

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Collaborating to continually strengthen the services provided to the entire community is an important outreach of the KCCO. As with all areas of our lives, the pandemic created a tremendous impact on the KCCO's ability to provide those opportunities in 2020. Before the official shut down, students from area nursing programs were able to observe autopsies, as well as local forensic science high school students were able to tour the Coroner's Office in January and February.

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# The COVID-19 Pandemic

*A Message from Coroner Russell to the Citizens of Kane County:*

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*“The COVID-19 Pandemic has been a very difficult time for all of the world’s people. Knowing how difficult it has been for you and your friends and family, **imagine that you have a job that requires you to go directly into a home where COVID is highly suspected.** Where someone has lost his/her life, quite likely from COVID, having experienced many or all of the known symptoms prior to his/her death. The surviving family members, who are present, may also be experiencing symptoms and be COVID positive.*

*This is the situation that the Kane County Coroner’s Office employees were (and are) faced with handling from Day 1 of the pandemic. We must assume everyone we come in contact with (as everyone does) may have the virus. However, it is a little different knowing the body you are to remove and care for likely has the virus, and COVID probably caused their death. Until test results come in, you don’t know. This makes a tragic situation a frightening one as well.*

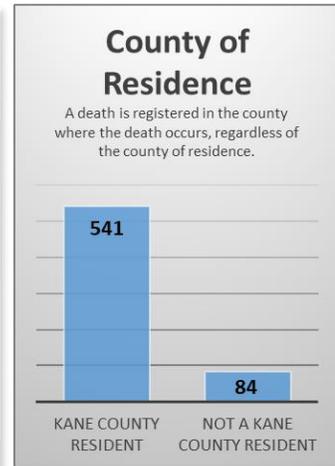
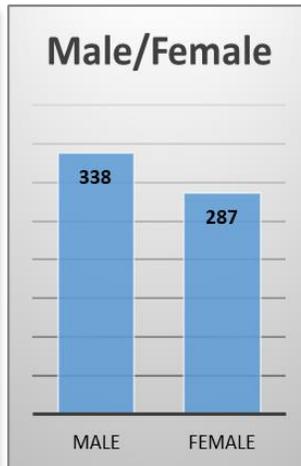
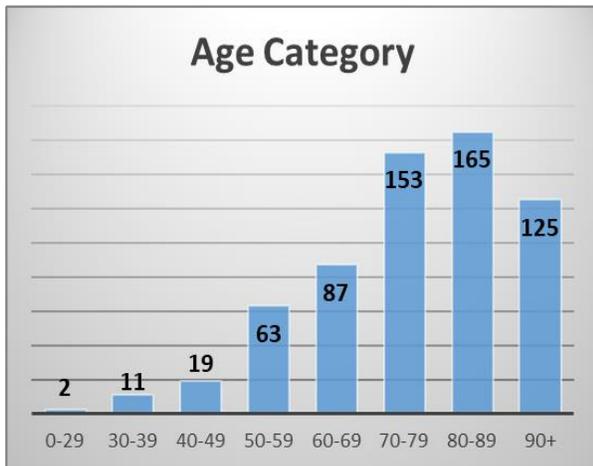
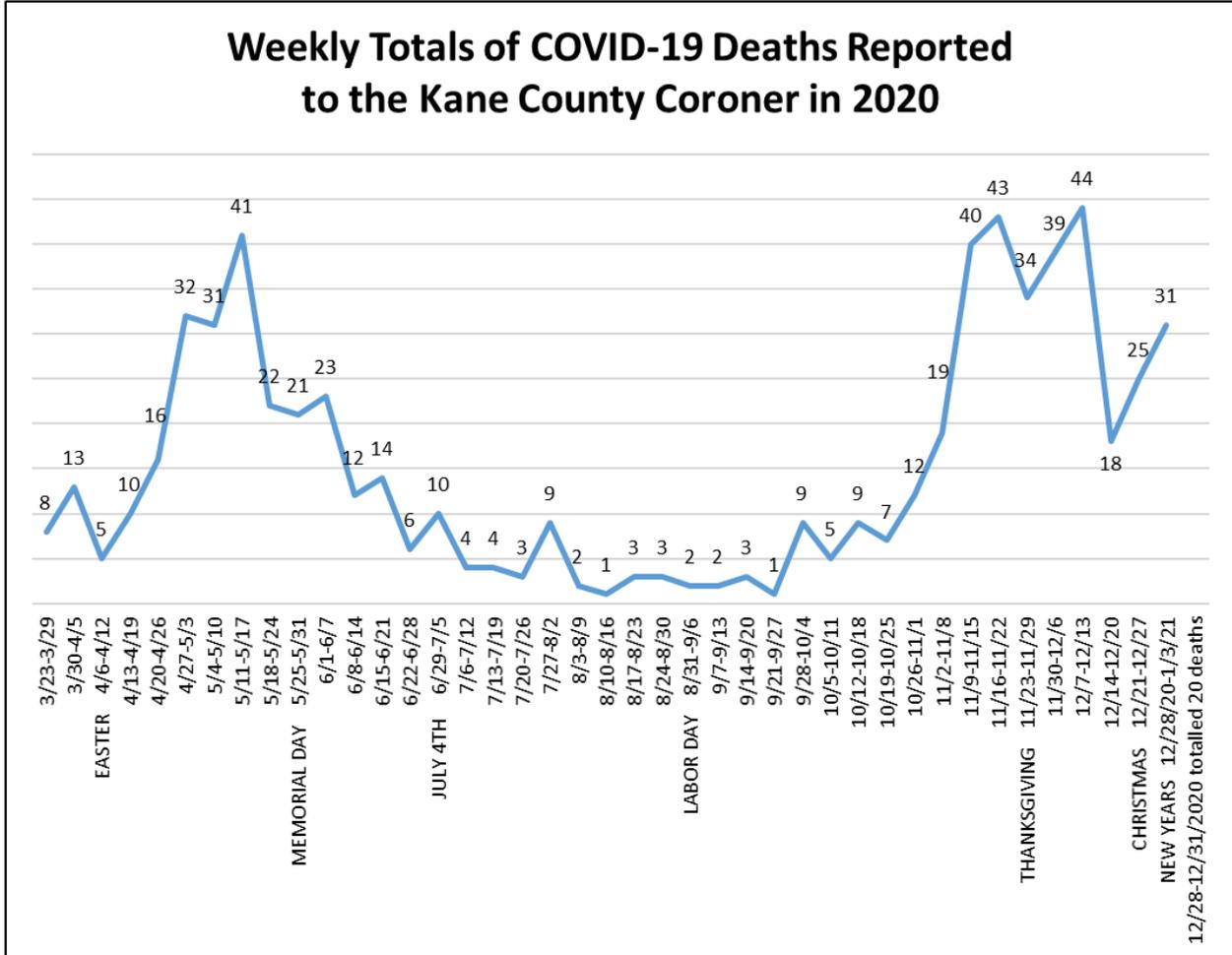
*Early on, there was not much known about the virus. This prompted us to immediately review and enhance our field protocols. We wore N95 masks and gloves on all calls (even if COVID-19 was not likely) as we had to interact with many people to process the investigation. On suspected, or known cases, we ‘pulled out all the stops’ and instituted protocols that we knew would be costly, but necessary. **On every suspected case, we wore a full biohazard suit, two pairs of gloves, an N95 mask or a respirator, and a face shield.** Face shields were made and donated by a local robotics team from Elgin, got robot? (please refer to page 16 about the face shields and collaboration). Our diligent efforts yielded a safer, more effective environment for our team members to exercise their duties. Although the steps taken were costly, with gloves, masks and other commodities being plentifully used, our due diligence was rewarded as none of the coroner’s office employees became ill with the virus.”*

*-Kane County Coroner Rob Russell*



# 2020 COVID-19 Statistics

625 COVID-19 Deaths Were Reported to the Kane County Coroner in 2020



# COVID-19 Mobile Morgue

*A Refrigerated Trailer (Mobile Morgue) at the Coroner's Office to Maintain Isolation and Safety*

NAPERVILLE SUN SUBURBS

## With mobile morgues and delayed burials, suburban coroners and funeral directors brace for jump in COVID-19 deaths

By ERIN HEGARTY and MEGAN JONES  
NAPERVILLE SUN | APR 07, 2020 AT 10:43 AM



Kane County Coroner Rob Russell and his staff are preparing for a large increase in the number of deaths in the coming weeks due to COVID-19. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

Excerpts from the April 7, 2020, story:

*Coroners in Kane County and Lake County have brought in refrigerated vehicles, sometimes called mobile morgues, for the first time.*

*The ominous preparations come as coroners and funeral home directors across the suburbs brace for what could be a surge in bodies with not enough space to store them all, especially as some families delay burying loved ones until it is safe for large groups to gather again.*

*Kane County Coroner Rob Russell projects his county could have 300 to 1,000 deaths connected to coronavirus.*

*"I don't know the time frame, but my office will play coordination with the funeral homes because they will be inundated with people," Russell said. "At some point, it will overcome their capacity, and we will need to work with the funeral homes to help with body storage and cremation." – Coroner Russell*



*Deputies transfer a deceased with COVID into the mobile morgue trailer parked behind the Coroner's Office.*

# 3D Printed PPE for COVID-19 Safety

4-H Robotics Team Donates 3D Printed Face Shields to the Coroner's Office – "The Last of the First Responders"

## Local 3-D printers becoming the front line of the PPE supply chain



Kane County Coroner Rob Russell wears one of the face shields donated to his office by a local teenage robotics team on 3-D printers. (Rick West | Staff Photographer)

From an April 6, 2020, *Daily Herald* story by James Fuller:

Kane County Coroner Rob Russell found a direct link to a growing network of teenage robotic teams with access to 3-D printers.

Russell and his staff are already using face shields printed by the teams.

"Are they as good as an N95 mask? No," Russell said. "But I'm making sure my staff is fully suited up, including gloves, eye protection and these face shields whenever they go out. And I'm going to take supplies wherever I can get them right now."

The "got robot?" team, coached by Mike McKellar, came across some open source schematics for the face shields after seeing a YouTube video of their creation with a 3-D printer. The team tweaked the recipe to cut the printing time from 90 minutes to 37 minutes per shield.

They've been churning them out since Sunday and delivering them to Russell, Amity Health St. Joseph Hospital in Elgin and even a local Butera food market.

### Coroner Russell thanks got robot? for their efforts, as well as OEM (Office of Emergency Management) and the Health Department for their outstanding work accessing the needed PPE equipment.

This collaborative effort contributed to the safety of the Coroner's staff and those whom they work with. For their work, got robot? was recognized as a National level ChangeMaker by the 4-H & Invalign ChangeMakers Program. Congratulations, team!



When hearing from Coroner Rob Russell that PPE was in short supply during the early months of the pandemic, members of the 4-H and FIRST Robotics FTC Team 5037, got robot?, printed, assembled, and delivered face shields to the Kane County Coroner's Office, as well as to other first responders, medical facilities, postal offices, and retail outlets, locally and across the country.

Dr. Mitra Kalelkar, Forensic Pathologist with the Kane County Coroner's Office, gave the face shields a trial run then encouraged the students to continue making face shields, until commercially manufactured equipment became available.

**By the end of April 2020, more than 4,000 face shields had been distributed.**



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# Honoring Those Who Served

*Collaborating with the Kane County Veterans Assistance Commission*

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The Kane County Coroner’s Office is an **investigative medicolegal office**. For each death, we investigate: **who they are, why did they die, who is their family or next of kin (NOK), and what are the family’s wishes?**

After a family is made aware of the passing of their loved one, they must choose a funeral home or cremation society whom they wish to care for the deceased. The family then chooses the method of final disposition, whether it be cremation, direct burial, or donation.

If the identity or NOK of the deceased are not immediately identified, Deputies continue searching, exhausting all options to find the identity of the deceased or their NOK by working with relevant law enforcement and searching National data bases. If needed, someone from the Coroner’s Forensic Specialty Team can help confirm identity.

If while investigating, our Deputies become aware that the decedent was or may have been a Veteran, they work with Veteran’s Affairs to confirm that information and the status of their DD-214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty). If the deceased was Honorably Discharged, their military benefits pay for burial, a headstone, a flag, and final disposition at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Illinois.

*“The Collaboration by separate offices within county government to ensure that a veteran has the proper final honors is truly remarkable.*

***Often times, we work very closely with the Coroner’s Office who alerts us to a possible veteran’s remains they have in their care.***

*We then work with other governmental agencies, including the County Recorder’s Office, to obtain proof of the veteran’s service.*

*The process is seamless and efficient and speaks to the high quality of service that different county departments provide for our veterans.”*

Jacob A. Zimmerman  
Superintendent, Kane County Veterans Association

Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery



The Memorial Walkway at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery.

## Kane County Veterans Assistance Commission

Accredited by:



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# State, Regional, and County Involvement

*Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths*

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**The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, task forces, and associations:**

## ***Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association***

The Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association (ICMEA) is a not for profit corporation for the purpose of uniting the members of the organization and upgrading the Office of Coroner and professionalizing it through the exchange of ideas and development of educational programs to the end that Coroners will be better equipped to discharge their statutory duties and thereby better serve the public to which their primary responsibility lies.



**Coroner Russell is a Past President of the Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association, serving in 2019.**

## ***Illinois Fatality Review Team Advisory Council***

The oversight body for the regional At-Risk Adult Fatality Review Teams (FRTs) is the Illinois Fatality Review Team Advisory Council (FRTAC). The Illinois FRTAC ensures that data, results, findings and recommendations of the FRTs are used in a timely manner to make any necessary changes to the policies, procedures, and State statutes in order to protect at-risk adults; collaborating with the Illinois Department of Aging in order to develop any legislation needed to prevent unnecessary deaths of at-risk adults.

## ***Illinois Child Death Review Team***

The purpose of Illinois Child Death Review Teams are to reduce the number of preventable child deaths in Illinois. When a child dies, the response by the State and community to the death must include an accurate and complete determination of the cause of death, the provision of services to the surviving family members, and the development and implementation of measures to prevent future deaths from similar causes. Multidisciplinary and multiagency reviews of child deaths assist in developing a greater understanding of the incidence and cause of child deaths, methods for preventing those deaths, and identifying gaps in services to children and families.

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# ***State, Regional, and County Involvement***

*Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths*

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***The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, task forces, and associations:***

## ***Region 2 Adult At-Risk Fatality Review Team***

The Region 2 Adult At-Risk Fatality Review Team (FRT) investigates abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of persons 60 years or older, and adults with disabilities aged 18-59, living in a domestic setting. As a regional interagency group, the purpose is to assist local agencies in identifying and reviewing suspicious deaths of adult victims of alleged, suspected, or substantiated abuse or neglect in domestic living situations then report findings to the Illinois Fatality Review Team Advisory Council, and make recommendations that may help to reduce the number of at-risk adult deaths caused by abuse and neglect and that may help to improve the investigations of deaths of at-risk adults and increase prosecutions, if appropriate.

## ***Kane County Opioid Task Force***

Spearheaded by the Kane County Health Department, this coalition of local leaders, law enforcement agencies, healthcare professionals, treatment center representatives and advocacy groups meet on an ad hoc basis to discuss opioid related issues in the county.

## ***Kane County Major Crimes Task Force***

The Kane County Major Crimes Task Force (KCMCTF) provides additional expertise, manpower and equipment to member agencies involved in a major investigation: homicide, serial sexual assault, serial arson, major arson and bombing, non-parental kidnapping, complex violent crimes against people, heinous crimes, and complex crime scene processing and evidence collection. The primary administrator or designee of any member agency may request KCMCTF assistance upon the discovery of a qualified incident.

## ***Kane County Fire Investigation Task Force***

The Kane County Fire Investigation Task Force (KCFITF) develops and implements strategies to investigate and prosecute responsible individuals. Each case presented to the States Attorney's Office since the inception of the KCFITF in 2000 has resulted in a successful prosecution.

The concept is simple; mobilize public and private resources, coordinate responsibilities and integrate the efforts of agencies, groups and persons who are involved, or should be involved, in such an organized strategy. The KCFITF works closely with all fire and law enforcement agencies within Kane County. When called to do so, the Task Force assists and/or augments a fire investigation as directed by the Incident Commander at the scene.

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# ***State, Regional, and County Involvement***

*Partnering to Investigate and Prevent Abuse and Preventable Deaths*

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***The Kane County Coroner's Office serves on the following teams, task forces, and associations:***

## ***Kane County DUI Task Force***

The DUI Task Force is a local anti-crime program created to enhance public safety by aiding law enforcement agencies in the apprehension of drivers impaired by alcohol and/or other drugs, thereby reducing the threat of DUI related traffic crashes, fatalities, and injuries posed by impaired drivers within Kane County.

## ***Kane County Hoarding Task Force***

Founded to create a cohesive, coordinated, and proactive response to self-neglect in Kane County by providing agencies, organizations and individuals with the tools required to better protect vulnerable adults.

Hoarding is a complex disorder that is made up of three connected problems:

- Collecting too many items
- Difficulty getting rid of items
- Problems with organization

These problems can lead to significant amounts of clutter which can severely limit the use of living spaces, pose safety and/or health risks, and result in significant distress and/or impairment in day-to-day living.

## ***Kane County Chiefs of Police Association***

As a Law Enforcement Administrator, Coroner Russell is a member of the Kane County Chiefs of Police Association (KCCPA). The KCCPA works to provide continued support for the following Kane County law enforcement programs:

- The KCC Major Crimes Task Force
- The Arson Task Force
- The Bomb Squad & Bomb Dog
- The Auto Theft Task Force
- The Kane County Accident Reconstruction Team
- The Kane County Honor Guard

Each of these support services is available to every police department in the county on a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year basis providing highly trained, technically proficient tactical officers, and special equipment to each of our communities; which otherwise are unaffordable to a single community or Police Department.

# Encouragement During the Pandemic

We are grateful for the Community we Serve



Cookies seem to be the theme. Talented young baker, Mikey Conley, son of Ben & CJ Conley of Conley Funeral Home, personally delivered some of his delicious home baked cookies to the KCCO staff.

Mikey commented, ***“Thank you for taking care of our community. Anyone that helps my mom & dad deserves my amazing cookies!”*** We agree, Mikey, they were pretty amazing cookies! Thank you!

Coroner Russell and the KCCO staff appreciate all the kind words and encouragement during 2020.

Throughout the difficult and challenging days of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, when weeks grew into months, The Kane County Coroner’s Office was even more grateful for the kind gestures of encouragement and appreciation extended by the community, those we serve, and by those businesses and agencies we work with.

In early 2020, before the pandemic hit in Kane County, we were surprised by a visit from volunteers with the Random Acts Matter non-profit. **The Coroner’s Office was nominated by a community member, and Random Acts Matter brought cookies for our staff to enjoy.** A bit of research found the Random Acts Matters website and learned they organized in 2017 in St. Charles with the thought, **“Small Acts, When Multiplied by Millions of People, Can Transform the World!!”** This act of appreciation most definitely encouraged Coroner Russell and his staff before the challenge of COVID-19 hit.

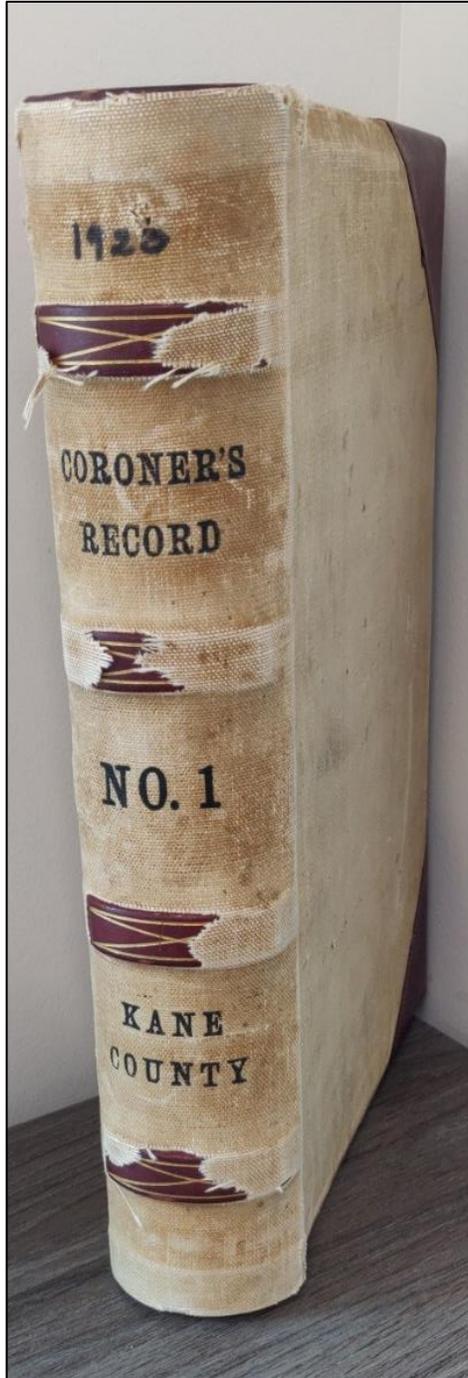


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## Looking back 100 years

*The Kane County Coroner's Office in 1920*

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*The '1920 Coroner's Record, No. 1, Kane County' is among the historical record books on file in Kane County Coroner Rob Russell's Office.*

The **1920 Coroner's Records, Kane County** shows that the Coroner's Office held inquests into 95 deaths. A review of the findings shows how times have changed. It is clear that the ever-increasing focus on safety measures in the work place, home, mental hospitals, and with all modes of transportation has greatly reduced the percentage of deaths related to those areas.

Work and farm related fatal injuries were more common in 1920. Eight such incidents were fall related. Three deaths were from falling through the hay chute of hay lofts onto the cement floors below. Two were the result of falling from work structures; a railroad trestle, and staging equipment at a bindery to the cement floor 17' below. One individual fell from the roof of a barn and one from the roof of a house, each while making repairs. One person fell to their death from a tree while picking cherries.

A farm worker died when his right leg was cut off at the hip while he was working on a threshing machine. Severe burns took the life of a worker at the Batavia Powerhouse when part of the hydraulic system, an oil compensator, exploded. The pilot of a government mail plane died when the plane crashed and caught fire while landing in foggy weather conditions. A building custodian was killed while using kerosene to revive the fire in the building's water heater. A worker who was oiling rail cars in a rail barn was fatally crushed between an iron post and an Interurban car.

Four deaths were caused in homes after clothing caught fire. One fire started when a can of oil exploded while the individual was lighting a stove. One fire was from a dropped lit match, one from a dropped lit smoking pipe, and one was of unknown origins. Asphyxia from illuminating gas used in homes in 1920 was the cause of two deaths. A unique and tragic accident took place on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920, when a citizen of Aurora was fatally struck by a piece of a cannon, which exploded when his neighbor loaded and fired the cannon.

Elgin State Hospital experienced ten deaths which were investigated by the Coroner in 1920. Four patients sadly died at the hands of fellow patients, three patients passed away from 'exhaustion,' one patient suffered a deadly head injury after a fall to the floor, and one patient drowned in the Fox River. The death of one patient was ascribed to 'acute gastritis, following overeating and the eating of green apples.'

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# Looking back 100 years

## *The Kane County Coroner's Office in 1920*

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Five fatalities happened in 1920 after individuals were thrown from vehicles: two were thrown from autos, two from horse drawn wagons, and one from a horse drawn cultivator. Fourteen pedestrians were killed as a result of incidents involving some type of vehicle: auto, truck, train, or street car. One person died as a result of injuries caused by being struck and crushed when hit by a passing streetcar while he was standing on the running board of another street car traveling in the opposite direction.

When comparing the death statistics and population change of 1920 Kane County (approximately 36,000 population) versus 2020 Kane County (approximately 534,000 population) the numbers clearly show that increased safety measures have reduced work place, farm, hospital, and transportation related fatal accidents.

A positive comparison is the 20 work related deaths in 1920, versus the 0 work related deaths in 2020. In 1920, the Coroner held Inquests into 29 transportation related deaths, while in 2020 the Coroner's Office investigated 26 transportation related deaths; considering the population has increased by 1,383%, that is a significantly lower number per capita. These lower numbers may be the result of years of work and policies implemented by OSHA, the National Safety Council and numerous other ISO's, (International Organization for Standardization).

Death investigation is a necessary and valuable tool in improving safety measures and policies. One hundred years ago, Inquest Juries in Kane County frequently suggested improvements related to train crossings in light of numerous pedestrian deaths. Today, the Kane County Coroner's Office collaborates with other local, state, and national professional agencies and organizations to address the root causes of unnecessary deaths, recommending policies to reduce the number of preventable deaths. See pages 18-20 for a complete list of the Kane County Coroner's Office involvement.

*An image of the '1920 Coroner's Record No. 1 Kane County' which contains the official records of Death Inquests for that year. Inquest are not now needed to definitely determine the cause and manner of death. In contrast, inquests often obstruct investigative efficiency. Because of this, the General Assembly changed the coroner's statute from stating "Shall" do an inquest, to "May" do an inquest. This gave coroners the option, under special circumstances, to conduct an inquest if necessary. Today, most investigations are determined without an inquest.*



## 2018 – 2020 Statistics

| Total Reported Deaths | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|
|                       | 3214 | 3283 | 4079 |

| Case Types   | 2018        | 2019        | 2020        |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Refer to page 7 to better understand types of cases. |             |             |             |
| RTM (Return to Medical)                              | 2797        | 2881        | 3579        |
| SO (Sign Out)  | 196         | 158         | 242         |
| SOU (Sign Out Unnatural)                             | 221         | 244         | 258         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>3214</b> | <b>3283</b> | <b>4079</b> |

| Method within SOU | 2018       | 2019       | 2020       |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Other             | 140        | 152        | 174        |
| Suicide           | 41         | 44         | 42         |
| Motor Vehicle     | 32         | 29         | 26         |
| Homicide          | 8          | 19         | 16         |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>221</b> | <b>244</b> | <b>258</b> |

| Manner of Death                | 2018        | 2019        | 2020        |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Natural                        | 2989        | 3038        | 3822        |
| Accident                       | 141         | 176         | 193         |
| Suicide                        | 41          | 44          | 42          |
| Homicide                       | 8           | 19          | 16          |
| CNBD (Could Not be Determined) | 30*         | 5           | 6           |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>3214</b> | <b>3283</b> | <b>4079</b> |

\*Includes the unusual investigation of an individual who died in 1920 whose bones were illegally dug up from a grave in a cemetery in 2018.

| COVID-19              | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|
| Known COVID-19 Deaths | 0    | 0    | 625  |

| To Organ Procurement Organization | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Organ Referrals                   | 221  | 240  | 176  |
| Tissue Referrals                  | 425  | 478  | 633  |
| Organ Donors                      | 9    | 16   | 11   |
| Tissue Donors                     | 111  | 138  | 62   |

### General Cause within Manner of Death

| Accident                    | 2018       | 2019       | 2020       |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Drug/Alcohol Intoxication   | 49         | 87         | 93         |
| CO Intoxication             | 1          | 3          | 2          |
| Chemical/Other Intoxication | 0          | 0          | 2          |
| Fall                        | 43         | 37         | 52         |
| Motor Vehicle               | 32         | 31         | 25         |
| Aspiration                  | 9          | 10         | 5          |
| Asphyxia                    | 0          | 1          | 2          |
| Drowning                    | 2          | 3          | 3          |
| Electrocution               | 1          | 0          | 0          |
| Exposure                    | 2          | 3          | 5          |
| Industrial                  | 0          | 1          | 0          |
| Surgery/Post Op             | 2          | 0          | 4          |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>141</b> | <b>176</b> | <b>193</b> |

| Suicide                   | 2018      | 2019      | 2020      |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gunshot Wound             | 18        | 17        | 16        |
| Hanging                   | 12        | 17        | 16        |
| Asphyxia                  | 1         | 2         | 2         |
| Drug/Alcohol Intoxication | 6         | 5         | 2         |
| CO Intoxication           | 3         | 1         | 2         |
| Chemical/Other Ingestion  | 0         | 0         | 1         |
| Fall from Height          | 1         | 0         | 2         |
| Pedestrian vs Train       | 0         | 1         | 0         |
| Motor Vehicle             | 0         | 0         | 1         |
| Exsanguination            | 0         | 1         | 0         |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>41</b> | <b>44</b> | <b>42</b> |

| Homicide               | 2018     | 2019      | 2020      |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gunshot Wound          | 7        | 17        | 14        |
| Stabbing               | 0        | 1         | 1         |
| Assault w Blunt Object | 0        | 1         | 0         |
| Strangulation          | 1        | 0         | 1         |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>8</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>16</b> |

## 2018 – 2020 Statistics

|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020        |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| Cases Receiving Investigation              | 3214 | 3283 | <b>4079</b> |
| Bodies Transported by KCCO                 | 342  | 347  | 448         |
| External Exams by KCCO                     | 365  | 397  | 454         |
| Partial Autopsies by KCCO                  | 0    | 0    | 0           |
| Full Autopsies by KCCO                     | 247  | 254  | <b>330</b>  |
| Hospital Autopsies Under KCCO Jurisdiction | 0    | 0    | 0           |
| Cases with Toxicology Performed            | 281  | 284  | 354         |
| Unidentified Bodies                        | 0    | 0    | 0           |
| Unclaimed Bodies                           | 7    | 9    | 25          |
| Exhumations by KCCO                        | 0    | 0    | 1           |

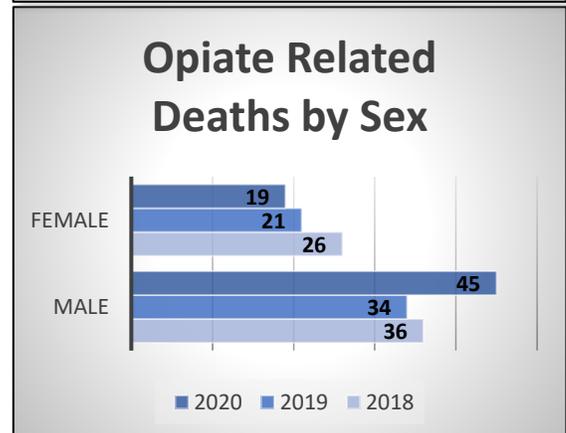
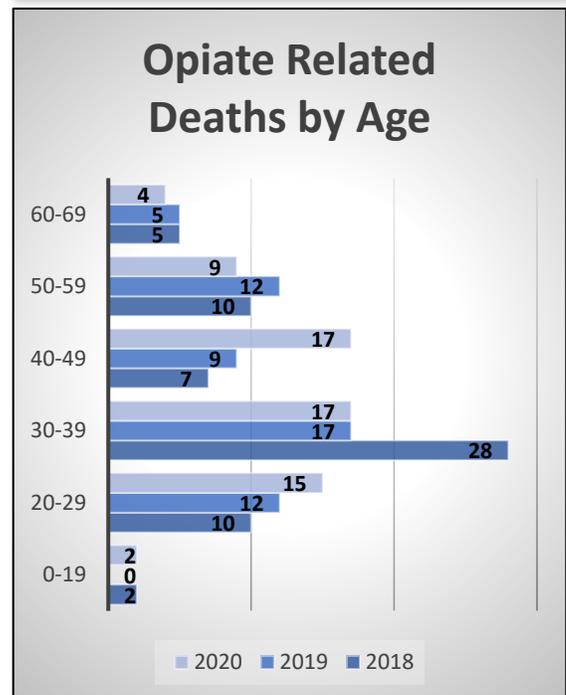
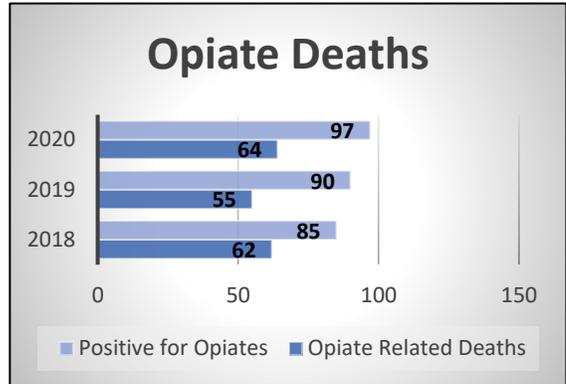
|                   | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Cremation Permits | 1995 | 2041 | 2579 |
| FOIA Requests     | 290  | 349  | 304  |

### Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Kane County Coroner’s Office is a public body. As such it is subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act (‘FOIA’), 5 ILCS 140/1, et seq. Under FOIA, members of the public can request and receive records of the Coroner that are kept in the Coroner’s ordinary course of business.

Under a separate state statute, the Coroner’s Office has the authority to charge a fee in exchange for the copying of these records. 55 ILCS 5/4-7001. All fees collected are deposited into a special account in the County Treasury to be used for the purchase of electronic and forensic identification equipment or other related supplies and the operating expenses of the Coroner’s Office.

|                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Autopsy Reports:               | \$50.00         |
| Toxicology Reports:            | \$25.00         |
| Verdict of a coroner’s jury:   | \$5.00          |
| Coroner Reports:               | \$25.00         |
| Transcript of sworn testimony: | \$5.00 per page |



*“A voice for those  
who can no longer speak for themselves.”*

*- The International Association of Medical Examiners and Coroners*

*The Kane County Coroner’s Office dedicates this  
publication to those who lost their lives in 2020,  
and to their families.*

*They are the reason we do what we do.*



*Serving the citizens of Kane County, Illinois*  
- Coroner Rob Russell







The Kane County Coroner's Office, as a law enforcement agency, investigates the death and provides critical services to surviving family members, relatives, and friends with compassion and dignity. Should you have any questions regarding this Annual Report, or this office, please do not hesitate to contact Coroner Rob Russell at 630-232-3535. 37W699 IL Rt. 38, St. Charles, IL 60175. (As of May 3, 2021: 719 S. Batavia Avenue, Building E, Geneva, IL 60134) <http://www.kanecountycoroner.org/>