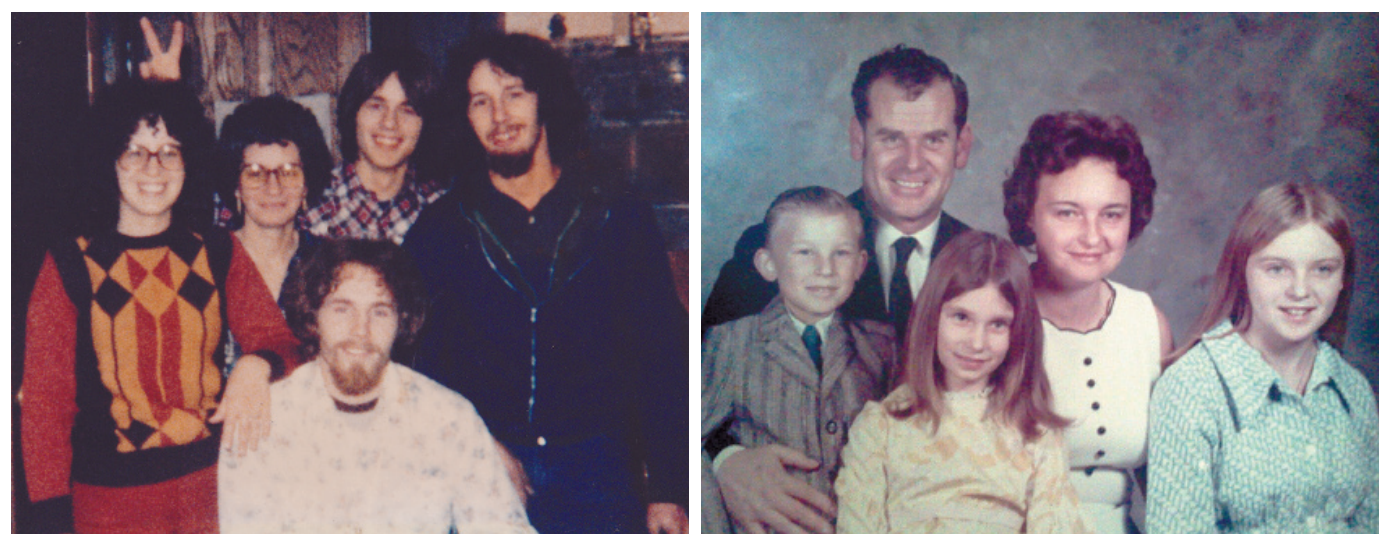




Copper Dollar Ranch

Waiting for justice



The families of the victims of the Copper Dollar Ranch murders have waited nearly 32 years to see a suspect stand trial for the killing of Steven Fisher, 20, and Melisa Gregory, 17. Left: Steven with his sister, Darlene Illingworth; mother, Thelma Fisher; brother, Ron Fisher; and brother Bill Fisher Jr., sitting. Right: Melisa, center, with her brother, Scott Gregory; father, Marvin Gregory; mother, Ida Reynolds; and sister, Lisa Gregory.

Families of slain Copper Dollar Ranch victims hope for closure

The following is part one of a two-part series previewing the double first-degree murder trial of Theresa “Terri” Supino, who allegedly killed her estranged husband, Steven Fisher, and his girlfriend, Melisa Gregory, March 3, 1983 at the former Copper Dollar Ranch northwest of Newton. Part one is a historical and emotional account of life since Supino’s arrest from the victims’ surviving family members. In Friday’s edition, Part two will preview Supino’s court proceedings, scheduled to begin Feb. 2 at the Black Hawk County Courthouse in Waterloo.

By Mike Mendenhall
Newton Daily News

It was nearly one year ago that Jasper County Sheriff John Halferty and the county attorney’s office announced the arrest of 54-year-old Theresa “Terri”

Supino for the 1983 double murder of 17-year-old Melisa Gregory and 20-year-old Steven Fisher at the former Copper Dollar Ranch northwest of Newton.

The last time the victims’ families spoke publicly about the murders was during the March 2014 candlelight vigil for Steven and Melisa on the Jasper County Courthouse steps following Supino’s arrest. In a Jan. 17 interview with the Newton Daily News, the surviving family members including Melisa’s sisters Lisa Gregory and Tanna Reynolds; brothers Travis Reynolds and Scott Gregory; Steven’s sister Darlene Illingworth and brother Ronnie Fisher explained how their lives have changed with a suspect in custody. Having Supino off the streets, Lisa Gregory said, has given both families a sense of comfort, and

life is moving at a different pace.

“I don’t even know where March 3 to today has gone,” Lisa Gregory said. “It has gone so fast for me, and now I’m counting the days (until the trial begins).”

“I feel much safer going outside,” Illingworth said. “We live in the country, right next to a church, and anybody can drive and be right at your door. You’d never even know that anyone’s around. That’s always been a concern.”

Cold Justice

For 30 years, Illingworth said her family knew few details of the murders. It was newly learned Supino and Melisa knew one another and had been feuding over Melisa’s relationship with Supino’s estranged husband. It wasn’t until the Jasper County Sheriff’s

Office officially reopened the investigation, involving the TNT program “Cold Justice” to provide its investigators with more resources, “all this started coming to light,” she said.

Illingworth admitted a distrust for the Supino family, she had no interaction with Supino in the 31 years since her brother’s murder. Thinking about Steven since March 3, 1983, brought dark images of the brutality of his murder.

“(The investigation) brought back a lot for me. To think about Steven over the past years is difficult,” Illingworth said. “The thought that comes to mind is how horribly he died. And not able to get that closure.”

The week “Cold Justice” filmed, Illingworth was in

Man arrested after death threat

By Jamee A. Pierson
Newton Daily News

After a short foot chase, a 32-year-old Newton man was arrested Monday on a warrant for an incident earlier this month in which he threatened to kill a man.

Chad E. Berry, 32, is charged with harassment and assault for the Jan. 18 incident in which police were called to the 100 block of North Second Avenue East.



Officers spoke with the victim who said Berry had come to the residence and Berry began hitting the victim. Berry continued to hit the victim leaving red scratches on his nose and red marks on the left side of his face.

During the fight, a lamp was broken and Berry allegedly threatened to hit the victim with it. Berry also told a female in the apartment to leave because he was going to kill the victim. When Berry walked outside, the victim managed to shut the door and block it with his body.

Berry allegedly produced a large buck knife with a blade approximately five inches long and tried ramming the door with his body to get back inside. He yelled at the victim “let me in [expletive], you’re going to die.” When the victim said he was calling the police Berry left. A warrant was later issued for Berry’s arrest.

Early Monday morning, officers observed a vehicle traveling at 60 mph in a 25 mph zone in the 100 block of South Fifth Avenue West. The vehicle turned on to East Second Street South and accelerated again at very high speeds. The officers then turned on the lights and pursued the vehicle. The vehicle eventually came to a stop in a driveway and Berry exited.

After a foot chase, Berry was apprehended by the officer. A subsequent search of Berry and his vehicle turned up pills, marijuana and methamphetamine. Berry faces additional charges for possession of a controlled substance, controlled substance violation, driving while barred and failure to affix a drug stamp. He was taken to the Jasper County Jail where he was later released after posting bond.

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JUSTICE | 8A

Samples galore planned for the HealthMarket Gala Friday

By Jamee A. Pierson
Newton Daily News

Samples and featured foods will be available at the HealthMarket Gala from 3 to 7 p.m. Friday at Hy-Vee, 1501 First Ave. E.

Dietitians Jenny Thompson and Emily Ring along with HealthMarket Manager Erin Blank will be available during the free event, which coincides with Taste of Hy-Vee, two days of food sampling from about every department in the grocery store. The Taste of Hy-Vee event runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

“When an individual comes into the store on Friday and Saturday they will see a significant amount of sampling, probably from every department,” Thompson said.

The HealthMarket Gala will feature specialty items that are found in the department including organic foods, protein bars, allergy alternatives and gluten-free items.

“It’s unique and typically there is something about that product that makes it different from other main stream

GALA | 3A

Knott retires after 30 years in advertising industry

By Kate Malott
Newton Daily News

In 1985, Ronald Reagan took office, the Kansas City Royals beat the St. Louis Cardinals in game seven of the World Series, Tina Turner had everyone asking, “What’s Love Got To Do With It?”; and a waitress at Mason’s Cafe, Bette Knott, decided to make a career change and began working for the Jasper County Advertiser and Shaw Media.

Mason’s Cafe was a popular downtown diner where numerous people went for lunch including employees of The Newton Daily News and Jasper County Advertiser. Knott had known and became friends with



Bette Knott sits at her desk in the Newton Daily News advertising department for one of the last times. Knott will retire on Monday after a 30 year career in advertising and more than 20 years at the newspaper.

many of the staff who encouraged her to interview for the advertising sales position, despite her lack of experience.

“The only thing I’d ever

sold is a cup of coffee,” Knott said.

In the 80s, employees at the newspaper designed the paper by hand, unlike the computer process used

today.

Typesetters would print copy and text from a book of various sizes and fonts.

KNOTT | 3A

SHAW

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75 CENTS

WHERE IT'S AT

Astrograph.....5B
Calendar.....5A
Classifieds.....4B

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Dear Abby.....6A
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FEATURE

Keeping your resolution

Big game shouldn't affect healthy habits / 2A

Volume No. 113
No. 178
2 sections
14 pages



On the morning of March 3, 2014, the Jasper County Sheriff’s Office announced a press conference would take place to release information on two unsolved Jasper County homicides. Sheriff John Halferty, center, spoke at the press conference. Also pictured are Jason Ferguson of the Altoona Police Department (left) and Jasper County Attorney Mike Jacobsen.

Justice: Family feels relief following Supino’s arrest

Continued from Page 1A

the middle of radiation treatment. She said the uncertain outcome of the three-week trial could be more arduous than any cancer treatment. The families all feel media coverage over the decades has moved the case forward and kept the memories of Steven and Melisa alive. Ronnie Fisher said without it, he believes they would not be heading to trial next week.

“My mom kept calling all the time,” he said. “She kept poking a stick in it to keep it going, which wasn’t good for her, but it was her way of coping.”

Lisa Gregory has never been completely comfortable with the attention. Like her mother Ida Reynolds, she has tended to bury the murders deep. But near her death, Steven’s mother Thelma Fisher told Lisa to never stop fighting for justice.

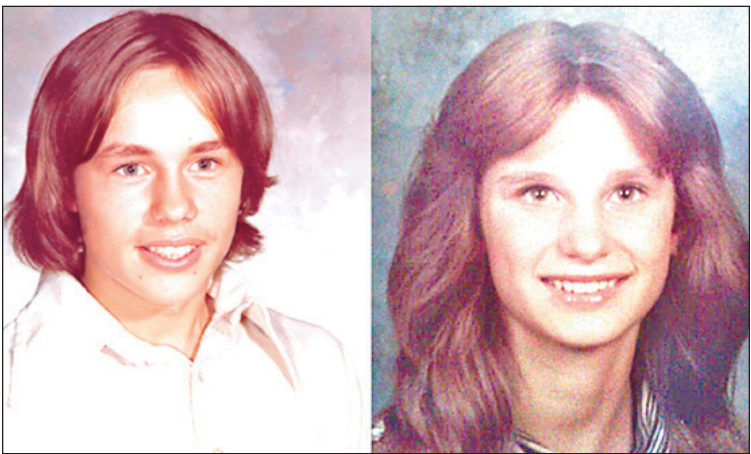
“At first, I didn’t want it. I don’t want it splattered,” Lisa Gregory said. “Yes, the coverage has helped. Thelma told me, she pulled me down and said I want you to keep at John (Halferty) and don’t let it go.”

Gregory called former Texas prosecutor Kelly Siegler and crime scene investigator Yolanda McClary from “Cold Justice” “awesome” and began to tear up when discussing the happiness the program has brought to families like hers. Illingworth said they did fear the nationally broadcast program would present something which would affect a jury. But the trial’s venue was changed by the courts to Black Hawk County, and they feel the TV program’s resources will continue to bring hope to families.

Prior to the first candlelight vigil in 2013, on the 30th anniversary of Melisa and Steven’s deaths, Illingworth and Lisa Gregory had never met. After 30 years of dead-end leads and longing for answers, the families decided exposure was a better alternative than living with a question hanging over their heads. The public display of solidarity was portrayed in both the Iowa news media and on “Cold Justice.”

But they’ve never shied away from one-on-one conversations with friends and community members. Ronnie Fisher said if anyone wants to speak about his brother Steven, he’s always been open — conversation could jog someone’s memory to bring needed leads to the surface. He said in the 11 months since Supino’s arrest, those conversations have naturally increased.

“I talked to a couple of ladies I used to work with at Maytag the other day. And they said



Steven Fisher and Melisa Gregory

they remember where they were when (the arrest) was announced. Kind of like a 9/11. But there was a lot of fear in this town,” Illingworth said.

“Since the arrest, I don’t know how many people have reached out to me. Even as children at the time, they said they remembered,” Lisa Gregory said. “A lot of them were coming up to me saying ‘We always knew.’ Nobody before had ever talked about what we thought, what they thought. It was just wasn’t talked about.”

Family Ties

Steven and Melisa’s mothers, Thelma Fisher and Ida Reynolds, did not live to see their children’s accused assailant stand trial. But Lisa Gregory believes, “They know. They’re up there watching.”

Steven’s family said a “big blow out” Thelma Fisher had with her 20-year-old son the Christmas prior to the murders was always present. This, Lisa Gregory said, caused Steven to live at their house with Melisa before staying in the camper, where the two were murdered. Photos Illingworth recently found of happier times show her mother hosting cookie parties, all smiles. But after Steven’s death, Illingworth said, her mother “lost her light.”

Melisa’s two youngest siblings, Tanna and Travis Reynolds, were only 18 months old and 8 months old, respectively, when their sister was murdered. Through the suspicion and arrest, the two have maintained a friendship with Supino’s daughter, Casey Supino. Tanna said she and Casey discussed Melisa’s murder only once throughout their childhood.

“We were both babies when it happened, so we put our friendship above it,” Tanna Reynolds said.

“Even after the arrest, Casey got a hold of us and said, ‘I hope this doesn’t change our friendship,’” Travis Reynolds added.

Tanna wasn’t aware she had another sister until she was 11 years old. Rummaging through boxes containing old photographs in their basement, a young Tanna found pictures of

an unknown girl on horseback and an autopsy report. She asked her mom about Melisa. Ida Reynolds had never spoken to Tanna about her older sister until the discovery.

“I imagine that had to throw you for a complete loop,” Illingworth said to Tanna. “Did it occur to you right away that she was your sister?”

“Not really. I don’t remember her. I remember the pictures I see up,” Tanna said. “That’s why I’m really scared because I don’t want to see the other pictures, and I know they’re going to be up (in court), too. I don’t know her that way. I know her now as I see her in the pictures on the wall at Lisa’s (home).”

“Then you need to be mindful,” Darlene said to Tanna. “And I don’t know if I can go every day. Just because there are things that I don’t really think that I after all these years need to know — the blood and gore part of it.”

What’s bothered Ronnie Fisher following the murders are comments made by his nephew, Steven’s son Rocky Supino, about his paternity. During media interviews and private conversations, Rocky Supino told Ronnie he does not believe Steven is his true father. Ronnie said he once brushed it off as the story his nephew was told by Supino since childhood. But in later years, he began to wonder if his brother and Supino’s marriage was based on a lie.

“If that is the case, then my brother and her got married under false pretenses that ultimately three years later led to his death,” Ronnie Fisher said. “That’s the way I look at it and feel now about it. If it is true, two people lost their lives because of a lie. That should have never happened.”

Illingworth said Steven always believed he was Rocky’s true father, but Supino would always use their son’s paternity as a way to escalate tensions during an argument.

The Trial

At the time the family spoke with the Newton Daily News, they were preparing to be

briefed by the county attorney and the sheriff’s office on the graphic images they could see in the courtroom. Illingworth and Lisa Gregory indicated they are scheduled to testify at some point during the three-week trial, but so they are not tainted by evidence presented prior to their testimony, the two will not enter the courtroom until they take the stand.

“I’m not subpoenaed to testify, so I could be in the courtroom from the start. But I’ll probably wait for her (Darlene) to go,” Ronnie Fisher said. “I don’t want her to go through it by herself.”

The memories and details surrounding the nearly 32-year-old murder of his brother are fading for Ronnie Fisher. “My recollection isn’t that clear, and Steven and I were close at that time,” he said. Three decades of life has pushed the events leading up to that night at the Copper Dollar Ranch to the back of his mind. He said reading his witness statements from 1983, the context appears as he would have spoken, but Ronnie said it’s still not the way he recalls the murders.

“I don’t want to have to be there (at the trial), but I’ll be there for my sister,” he said.

The last time Illingworth saw Terri Supino outside of a courtroom was at a Hy-Vee roughly one year before her mother’s death. The awkward exchange began with Supino running up to Thelma Fisher giving her a hug.

“I’ve got a certain satisfaction out of seeing her sit out there (in jail) all this time,” Illingworth said. “Even if she doesn’t get anything more, at least she got to sit out there and think about it for a while. If nothing else happens, I’ve heard she’s spent most of her time hiding in the bedroom and coping with life in different ways.”

“Knowing what’s going to come, there’s going to be nothing easy about this. It’s going to be hard,” she said. “I don’t know if I’m prepared for that yet.”

Investigators’ resolve

Lisa Gregory and Tanna Reynolds credit Halferty’s personal stake in their sister’s murder with finally bringing momentum to the case. Due to the proximity to the trial date, Halferty declined the Newton Daily News’ request for a pre-trial interview, but he indicated in the “Cold Justice” episode that he sat next to Melisa during a class in middle school. Calling himself a “shy kid,” he said he remembered Melisa as kind person with a “great smile.” Lisa Gregory said when Halferty became the sheriff’s

chief deputy, she knew the case would get a strong look.

“He said, ‘This cannot sit any more. I want to bring this back,’” Lisa Gregory said. “I truly don’t think anything would have come out if it was not for John.”

It is unclear if modern forensic science will play any role in the state’s evidence against Supino, but the families of Melisa and Steven agree that as technology developed it brought increased hope that something could be reexamined. Illingworth said it gave her hope and wishes the same for families and victims of other unsolved cases. She said she always believed a break in the case would come from someone’s heart.

“I kept thinking it’d be in the form of someone on their death bed that didn’t want to leave with this on their conscience,” Illingworth said. “And I had high hopes that when this all came about that she would come forward, admit to it and save everybody in our and her family a lot of grief.”

Strength in uncertain future

Both Melisa and Steven’s family said if Supino is not convicted, they will continue their fight for justice. To Ronnie Fisher, a not guilty ruling would not alter his suspicions toward Supino. That, he said, would take a complete turn in the evidence.

“The only thing that would change my mind is if there was another arrest or another conviction. Then I guess I probably would owe her and her family an apology. But I don’t see that happening,” he said.

The defendant’s demeanor following the murder, including what Illingworth saw as a lack of remorse during Steven’s funeral and concern about trivial matters such as the couple’s shared vehicle, has always raised suspicion for her. But Illingworth said if proof arose to her satisfaction that cleared Supino, she would forgive her brother’s accused killer.

“I would ask for anything. If people remember anything — a strange car in a strange place. I think there are people still out there that might know something,” Illingworth said. “But I’d like to thank everyone for being there for us for all these years.”

“Thank you to everyone in the town of Newton,” Lisa Gregory said. “We have a long road ahead of us, but I truly think it’s time for justice.”

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