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NEWS

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*****Medical artists sculpt faces to aid
in body identification.

DALLAS--Using techniques conveyed to him by mail and phone, medical illustrator Scott Barrows at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas recently reconstructed the face of a body unidentified for about a year. The identity was thus confirmed together with dental records, enabling the man's family to collect his life insurance.

Now Barrows is looking forward to a personal critique and demonstration by his mentor, Betty Pat. Gatliff, a Federal Aviation Administration medical illustrator in Oklahoma City, when she visits the campus April 23 and 24 to share her famous skills.

One of Gatliff's most noteworthy jobs was a cast she made of President John Kennedy's head for the House Select Committee on Assassinations. From autopsy measurements she had 14 dimensions from which to cast the skull and 41 dimensions from which to sculpt the face. Her re-creation of Kennedy's head when analyzed by computer with the Zapruder movie showed the President was hit by two shots fired six inches apart from the air, not from the ground.

Gatliff's lecture on forensic anthropology April 23 from 1 to 3 p.m. (in Room DI.200) will include slides of the Kennedy project as well as other works she has done.

As the nation's most noted "last resort" face finder for law enforcement agencies, she acted as technical advisor and did an on-camera reconstruction for the Jan. 27 episode of "Quincy" on NBC-TV.

Eager to share her skills and spread the identification work around, she will present a demonstration for medical illustration students April 24 at 10 a.m. The demonstration may be seen via closed-circuit television in Richardson Lecture Hall (Room DI.502).

The technique involves sculpting the face out of clay, using the cleaned and bleached skull as a base. The artist starts by applying sections of pencil eraser to simulate tissue of average thickness at certain bony points on the face, then connecting the erasers with clay strips. Using known physical ratios, the artist positions prosthetic eyes, builds up facial surfaces and models nose and ears.

"Everybody's nose is different--it may be rounded or it may come to a point. It sounds unscientific, but you have to have an instinct for how it should look. And on the reconstruction I did, it worked. Betty says her first impression is usually right," said Barrows. Since medical artists are trained in anatomy and also in sculpture, they are particularly suited to forensic facial reconstruction.

Each year Dallas County Institute of Forensic Science receives four or five unidentified bodies in which this technique could be used, according to Roger Smith, a questioned document examiner. In the interest of establishing this identification service locally, the institute is cosponsoring Gatliff's seminars with the Department of Biomedical Communications.

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