

Bodies of missing residents found Saturday

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The Leonard Graphic has received the unfortunate news that the bodies of the three Leonard residents reported missing this week were discovered early Saturday afternoon. Fannin County Sheriff's deputies - who have worked around the clock since Wednesday on this case - recovered the remains of 73-year-old Harold Harpst, 79-year old Sue Harpst and 48-year old Regina Taunton in neighboring Grayson County. The silver 2007 Dodge Caravan also reported missing with the three has not been located, however. A source stated that their cause of death was undetermined at this time, but that Sue Harpst's 52-year-old son, Thomas Taunton - who was named as a person of interest from the beginning and arrested Thursday in Louisiana on capital murder charges - remains their prime suspect.

The case began Wednesday after police received information that there may be three people missing from the county. Officers went to the location on State Highway 78 north of Leonard, but were unable to make contact with anybody at the residence. After gaining entrance and searching the property, they still were unable to locate anybody at the home, but did see several suspicious things that led them to believe foul play was involved. Due to the fact that no bodies were found, police deemed the investigation a missing persons case.

The case took investigators to Stonewall, La., on Thursday after Taunton was tracked there and taken into custody at an automobile repair shop. Investigators hoped to find the missing persons in the utility trailer Taunton was pulling behind his Ford truck, but they only found more evidence that led them to further believe he committed the crimes. Investigators have not said what evidence they have found at the home or in the truck and trailer. Their continued, tireless efforts to solve this case led them to discovering the remains Saturday near the intersection of State Highway 11 and FM 1417 near Luella.

Thomas Taunton is Sue Harpst's son, Harold Harpst's step-son and Regina Taunton's brother. A living sister has sat in disbelief that her brother is the prime suspect in the case - stating that he never got angry, and she doesn't think he could do this. Many Leonard residents who knew the Harpst's stated that they were a nice couple and hoped the result would be good news. That, however, is not the situation, and the case is officially a homicide. Taunton remains in custody in Louisiana awaiting extradition.