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TECHNOLOGY

A local company is helping catch cold case criminals from coast to coast. Here's where it's gone to work.



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PARABON'S CASELOAD

Parabon has a growing roster of cases — now up to 69 — that have resulted in positive identifications of perpetrators since introducing its genetic genealogy service in May 2018. But the company has had its hand in hundreds of cases: some it worked pre-2018 using its legacy phenotyping service, some it can't discuss and others that are ongoing. Here are just some of the cold cases that have seen new developments, thanks to Parabon.



If you've read a news story in the past year and a half about a new lead in an unsolved crime, chances are [Parabon NanoLabs Inc.](#) has come onto your radar.

And if not, [it's about to.](#)

The Reston-based DNA technology company has been helping police crack decades-old cases – hundreds of thousands of gruesome murders, rapes, abductions and assaults – to narrow suspect lists and find new openings in long-stalled investigations.

Check out the map above for a breakdown of where Parabon has gone to work.

The new information can heat those cold cases back up, law enforcement has found, as agencies use Parabon's leads to pinpoint and then investigate possible perpetrators, many of whom plead guilty when a direct DNA match is confirmed. And, slowly but surely, the tight knots around a seemingly impossible collection of

Parabon started down this trail in 2010, when it won a Small Business Innovation Research program solicitation to see if it was possible to determine physical appearance from genetic information. That led to another project and, ultimately, the birth of Parabon's Snapshot tool, to create a composite sketch of a person from their genetic makeup.

Then in 2018, when the notorious Golden State Killer was caught using a technique called genetic genealogy, the local company upended its entire business. It had been waiting to go live with a genetic genealogy service of its own, and that was a signal to make the move.

"We turned our business completely on its head and changed all of our collateral, marketing, came up with cost structures – all of it, we did in two weeks' time," said Parabon co-founder and CEO [Steven Armentrout](#).

Parabon came to lead the space; genetic genealogy has been its bread and butter ever since. In less than 18 months, the company's small team – only 26 people for both its forensics unit and separate therapeutics divisions – has helped detectives find 70 offenders, consequently clearing many innocent people from those investigations. The firm is changing the frustrating, open-ended narrative around cold cases, writing new endings from our own backyard.

So how did this quiet player become a leader in DNA technology before the niche really even existed? And what does it mean for the future of its business, the emerging industry and criminal justice as a whole? We set out to answer those questions in a recent cover story, "[Parabon keeps cracking cold cases. And it's just warming up.](#)"

In the week since publishing that story, Parabon has continued to contribute to new developments. An Alexandria man [pleaded guilty Thursday](#) to a 2016 rape, after Parabon had identified him as a suspect and law enforcement linked his DNA to that of the crime scene. And the company added yet another positive identification to its own tally [just a few days ago](#), keeping up with its rate of about one per week.

Its growing rolodex goes beyond those solved with genetic genealogy; Parabon has worked on hundreds of cases, some prior to 2018 and others it continues to explore. Check out the interactive map above for a geographic breakdown.

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