

## W02 - Breaking News

### **Raleigh police units arrive in Pittsylvania County; Banks case now a homicide**

By ELIAS WEISS

*Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator*

PITTSYLVANIA Co., Va. (Sept. 17, 2020) — Police today are treating the disappearance of William "Andy" Banks as a homicide.

Raleigh police first reported 39-year-old Banks missing Saturday around 2 p.m. in the Cameron Village neighborhood, an upscale shopping and residential district.

"He met two people from Craigslist to try and sell his car," friend Amanda Finch told the Star-Tribune this morning. "He hasn't been seen or heard from since."

Banks is blond and 6 feet tall, last seen wearing blue Patagonia shorts, a gray shirt with a picture of a mountain on the front and flip flops.

A respondent to Finch's Facebook post about Banks's disappearance reported seeing his silver 2012 Range Rover off the U.S. 29 bypass in Blairs, by the stop sign, with the lights turned off.

"I didn't think much of it, except that was a weird spot to leave a range rover," the respondent said.

The last sighting of his car was last night around 8:30 p.m.

Banks's cell phone was also found on North Carolina interstate 440 heading west from Raleigh toward Danville.

"We have friends that are tech people," Finch said. "They were able to look through Andy's messages through a cloud on his laptop that was at home. They were able to find out that the phone number they were using to text Andy was a burner phone."

The burner phone was reportedly last pinged in Danville.

Tuesday, Danville police arrested Danville man Justin Fernando Merritt, 34, on charges of robbery, larceny of motor vehicle and possession of a firearm by convicted felon in connection with the stolen vehicle.

Banks's silver 2011 Range Rover SUV was reportedly under a tarp in a vacant building on Merritt's street.

Police reportedly found Merritt in possession of the SUV, along with an illegally obtained handgun, ammunition, three cell phones and two spent shell casings.

Prosecutors said there was zero evidence of criminal conduct by Banks.

Merritt said he intends on hiring his own lawyer. Judge Ned Mangum raised Merritt's bond from \$265,000 to \$2 million.

This afternoon, a *Star-Tribune* reporter located five Raleigh Police Department vehicles in the parking lot of Vandola Baptist Church in Pittsylvania County.

The Raleigh Police Department could not confirm why the officers were in this location, but could confirm that investigation of the Banks case remains ongoing.

## **Raleigh man's remains found in Chatham**

By ELIAS WEISS

*Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator*

PITTSYLVANIA Co., Va. (Sept. 17, 2020) — Sources confirmed to the *Star-Tribune* this afternoon that the remains of 39-year-old Raleigh man William "Andy" Banks were found by investigators on Beechnut Road in rural Chatham.

"It was Raleigh detectives who came up to our door, walking our farm," a local resident told the *Star-Tribune*. "They said they were looking for him [Banks] and asked if we saw his [2011 Range Rover] on Saturday."

This local resident owns the property searched today by Raleigh detectives. She reported seeing 30 Raleigh police units around her Beechnut Road property this morning.

"They said they would bring cadaver dogs by later when it stopped raining," the local resident continued. "But then they came by and said, 'Just wanted to let you know we found him, thank you.'"

Investigators reportedly used geo-location to triangulate a cell phone involved in this case, and it pinged for 20 minutes around the local resident's property.

Raleigh Police in conjunction with the Virginia DOT blocked off Route 703 by Beechnut Road this afternoon with flares sending warning smoke into the air.

## **EXCLUSIVE: Investigators reveal where Banks's body was found**

By ELIAS WEISS

*Star-Tribune Digital Coordinator*

PITTSYLVANIA Co., Va. (Sept. 17, 2020) — Pittsylvania County Sheriff's Office Investigator Rick Baxter this afternoon exclusively showed the *Star-Tribune* the exact location where Raleigh and Pittsylvania Police together found the body of William "Andy" Banks.

Baxter and his team found the body at 3800 Irish Road in Chatham.

The remains were found lying in the tall grass.

Banks's body is being transported to Roanoke Memorial Hospital for an autopsy, Baxter said. Updated court records show that Justin Fernando Merritt, 34, has been charged with felony murder in Wake County, North Carolina.

Clerk personnel in the Wake County Clerk of Court's office were able to confirm that Merritt is charged with the murder of Banks.

Thursday afternoon, search parties of Raleigh Police Department officers and Pittsylvania County Sheriff's Department deputies found the remains of Banks on the side of Irish Road in Chatham in the 3800 block.

Danville Police reported Merritt was arrested Tuesday for being found in possession of a stolen vehicle and is facing additional charges of larceny of a motor vehicle, armed robbery and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Merritt has a court appearance scheduled in Wake County court Friday morning for the charge of felony murder.