

'Missouri Miracle': Today Marks 14 Years Since Shawn Hornbeck And Ben Ownby Found

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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KIRKWOOD - Fourteen years ago today in a suburb of St. Louis called Kirkwood, Missouri, the term “Missouri Miracle” came about.

FBI and Police from across Missouri started searching four days earlier for Ben Ownby who was kidnapped from his rural bus stop in Franklin County, Missouri. If it wasn't for Mitchell Hults, a teenage boy who witnessed the kidnapping, the Missouri Miracle probably wouldn't have come true.

A description of the vehicle that was wanted in connection with Ben Ownby's kidnapping led police to an apartment complex in the 400 block of South Holmes Street in Kirkwood.

The white beat-up white truck that Mitchell described to police sat outside the apartment. On January 12, 2007, police and FBI agents entered the apartment and located Ben Ownby and a second boy sitting on a sofa quietly.

The second boy was Shawn Hornbeck, who had disappeared more than four years earlier from his own rural neighborhood of Washington County. When Shawn came up missing he was 11 years old and was riding his bike alone on October 6, 2002, when Michael Devlin was patrolling quiet roads for months searching for a young victim. Driving his pickup, he knocked Hornbeck off his bike and kidnapped him.

The man who kidnapped Shawn Hornbeck and Ben Ownby was identified as Michael J. Devlin, a pizza-restaurant manager. Devlin confessed to both kidnappings. That fall Devlin pleaded guilty to multiple counts of kidnapping and sexual assault and was sentenced to 74 life sentences in Missouri and 170 years of federal time.

Devlin told FBI agents the reason he began looking for another boy was that Shawn was getting too old. Devlin went to Beaufort, Missouri, where he kidnapped Ben Ownby from his bus stop. Shawn was with him in the pickup.

When the boys were found Gary Toelke, the Franklin County sheriff at the time made the announcement outside his office at a press conference. "We have some good news for you and probably some unbelievable news. We located Ben this afternoon in the City of Kirkwood and we also located Shawn Hornbeck, who was at the same residence." The news spread all across the world.



