

**NEWBERRY COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE
2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

Laura G. Kneece, Coroner



NEWBERRY COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA



Office of the Coroner
Newberry County
Laura G. Kneece, F-ABMD
550 Wilson Road • Newberry, South Carolina 29108
Office: 803-405-7790 / Fax: 803-405-7890
After hours, weekends, & holidays: 803-321-2222

To the Citizens of Newberry County,

I am pleased to share our 2019 Annual Report. My goal in making this information public is to increase the public's awareness about the role of the Coroner's Office and to bring attention to the cause and manner of deaths in our county in effort to prevent such deaths where possible.

The information you will find in this annual report has been gathered from records held by the Newberry County Coroner's Office which includes: Autopsy reports, police reports, death certificates, cremation permits, and motor vehicle reports. It is our wish to provide the public with the most up-to-date and complete information possible in a format that is accurate and easy to read.

I hope these statistics will be of value to you. If you have any questions or need any further information, please feel free to contact my office.

As always, thank you for your support,

Coroner Laura G. Kneece, F-ABMDI

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Description, Purpose, and Function of the Newberry County Coroner's Office

The main take of the Coroner's Office is to determine both the medical and legal cause of death in Newberry County with priority on sudden, suspicious deaths, as well as deaths that occur for no apparent reason. The Coroner is a County official whom is elected to serve a four-year term.

The Coroner, an elected constitutional office, has jurisdiction over all deaths that are investigated by their office. Generally, the Coroner is responsible for investigation of all suspicious and violent deaths, as well as all deaths that occur outside of a hospital or nursing home. In addition to the scenarios mentioned above, the Coroner/Coroner's Office is also responsible for the investigation of all deaths that occur less than 24 hours after patients are admitted to the hospital as well as all emergency room deaths. The Newberry County Coroner's Office operates under South Carolina State Law Title 17. Criminal Procedures, Chapter 5. Coroners and Medical Examiners, Article 1. Definitions 17-5-5 through 17-5-60. For additional information regarding South Carolina State Law, you may refer to the website, www.statehouse.gov.

It is the sole responsibility and authority of the Coroner to determine the cause and manner of death of every person who dies within Newberry County or receives an injury in Newberry County which results in death, regardless of the location. As circumstances warrant the Coroner may retain the assistance of experts in the fields of anthropology, entomology, pathology, photography, radiology, trace evidence collections, toxicology, and other fields of forensic science to assist in their investigation. The Coroner has to determine and make the decision between natural, accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined as a cause for death. The Coroner is also responsible for deciding when an autopsy should be performed.

It is the responsibly of the Coroner to see that all evidence at the scene of a death is preserved, as well as all personal belongings of the decedent are safeguarded and returned to his/her family. When possible, the Coroner personally notifies relatives and loved ones of the unfortunate death.

In addition to the above responsibilities, the Coroner also conducts inquests, issues burial removal transit permits, authorizes and issues cremation permits, signs death certificates, and maintains permanent records of every case.

Laura G. Kneece, F-AMBDI, has served the residence of Newberry County as the Coroner for the last three years. She began her career in 2000 at Lexington County Sheriff's Department as a Road Patrol Deputy, School Resource Officer and Crime Scene Investigator. She is a 2007 Cum Laude graduate of Kaplan University having majored in Criminal Justice.

Newberry County Coroner's Office 2019 Annual Report

In 2009, she was hired as the Forensic Death Investigator at Lexington County Coroner's Office, serving at the pleasure of the late Coroner Harry O. Harman. During her tenure at Lexington County Coroner's Office, she became Board Certified in Medicolegal Death Investigation through The American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigation.

Coroner Kneece worked as a morgue assistant for Newberry Pathology Associates and Forensic Pathologist Dr. Janice (Pat) Ross.

Coroner Kneece is a member of the SC Coroner's Association, the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, The American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators and the Newberry County Law Enforcement Officers Association. She has spoken routinely to community groups, schools, and healthcare professional on various topics relating to death investigation.

The Coroner's Office seeks to find the answers to the questions which are important to the following groups of people: The decedent's family, involved law enforcement agencies, insurance companies, the judicial system, Consumer Product Safety Commissions, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), and federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and well as various other state and federal agencies. The pursuit of civil or criminal proceedings is in part determined by the ability of the Coroner's Office to determine the cause and manner of death. This unique makeup of job responsibilities means the Coroner's Office performs both a public service and a judicial role that requires the Coroner to scrutinize every death within her jurisdiction to determine the events that led to death in an individual.

The Coroner's Office also functions as an advocate for families to ensure they are notified of the death as well as the circumstances surrounding the death known at that time. As more information is derived from autopsy and/or further investigation, the Coroner's Office staff updates family members and also assists them in contacting other agencies that can help through the grieving process.

Newberry County Coroner's Office 2019 Annual Report

The Newberry County Coroner's Office served the residents of Newberry County in a variety of ways highlighted by:

- ❖ Performing independent investigations that look into traumatic deaths, deaths that occurred outside of hospitals and deaths that occur suddenly or unexpectedly 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- ❖ Making identification of deceased;
- ❖ Removing the body from the scene in a dignified manner;
- ❖ Notifying families when an unexpected death occurs;
- ❖ Determining the necessity of autopsy, anthropologic examination or odontology examination;
- ❖ Creating reports that relate to the deaths investigated by this office;
- ❖ Issuing burial removal transit permits for individuals who have died outside of a hospital;
- ❖ Providing autopsy and Coroner's reports to agencies and next-of-kin;
- ❖ Releasing information to the public, only when deemed necessary;
- ❖ Making final determination as to the cause and manner of death;
- ❖ Securing and releasing personal effects to the next-of-kin;
- ❖ Acting as the depository for all records relative to a death, including the autopsy report, police investigative report, and any other investigative agencies' reports;
- ❖ Providing testimony at depositions and in court;
- ❖ Maintaining the County Coroner's Book of Inquisitions;
- ❖ Conducting inquests;
- ❖ Issuing cremation permits;
- ❖ Conducting case reviews with local, state, and federal agencies, as needed;
- ❖ Participating as a member of the Disaster Preparedness Team;
- ❖ Providing speakers for community awareness and educational programs within schools, community organizations and various professional organizations;
- ❖ Routinely keeping up with the latest in investigation techniques and technology through training with various agencies and professional organizations;
- ❖ Working with organ and tissue donation procurement teams in a collaborative effort to ensure that the decedent's wishes and those of their families are honored;
- ❖ Notifying the public of any public health concerns related to a death;
- ❖ Notifying the media, upon request of public information regarding a death or other statistical information.

The Newberry County Coroner's Office regularly participates in community activities and safety preventions, such as participating in local drug-take back events and Prom Promise events.

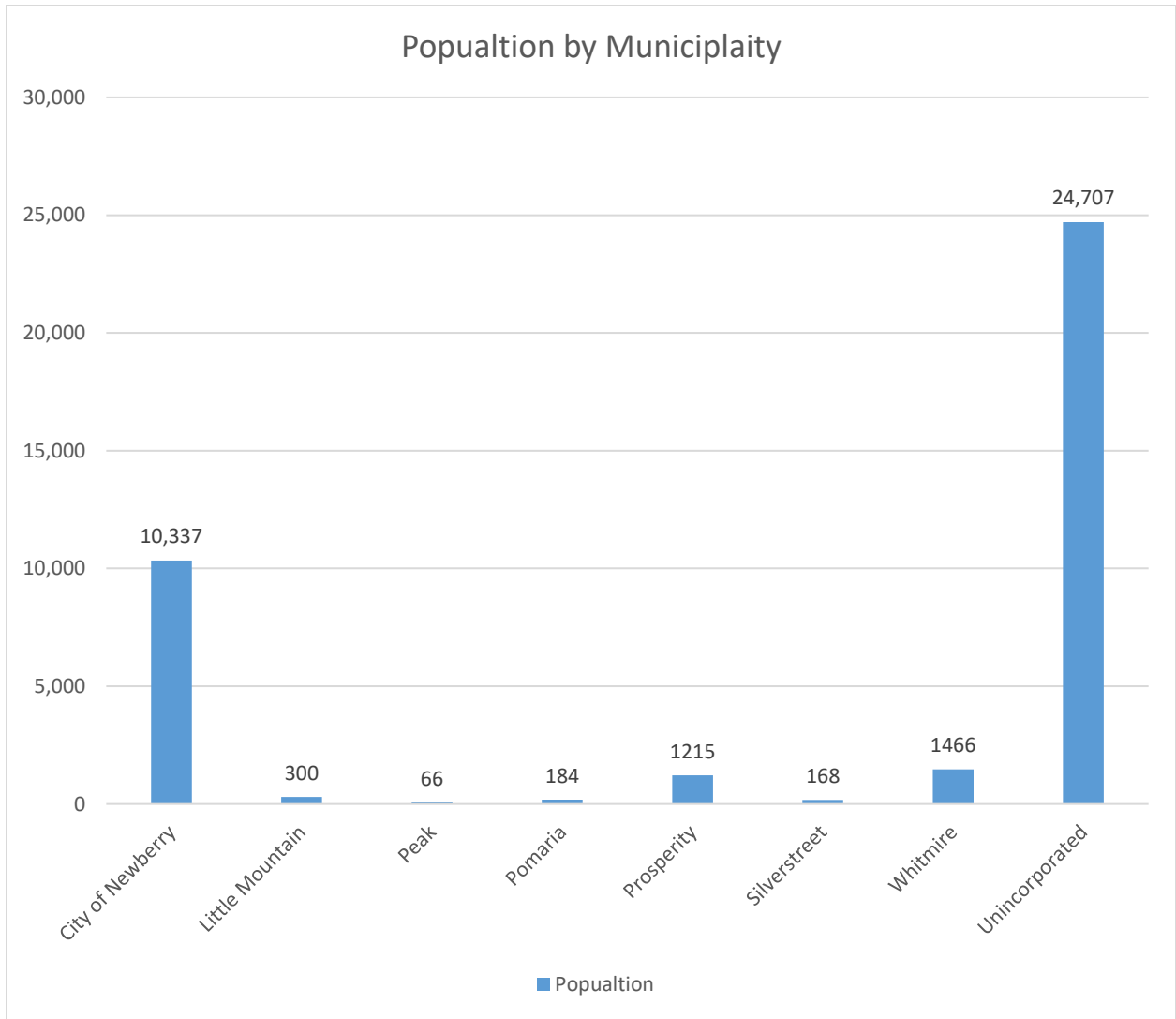
BUDGET AND FUNDING

The Fiscal Year 2018-2019 budget for the Newberry County Coroner's Office was \$170,942.00. This was less than 1% (0.006) of the total approved Fiscal Year 2019 Newberry County operating budget of \$24,967,550.00.

The Fiscal Year 2019-2020 budget for the Coroner's Office 179,047.00. This was less than 1% (0.007) of the total approved Fiscal Year 2019 Newberry County operating budget of \$25,490, 899.00.

SIZE AND POPULAITON OF NEWBERRY COUNTY

Newberry County was founded in 1785 and is located approximately 40 miles west of Columbia, South Carolina. The geographic area served by the Newberry County Coroner's Office which includes all of Newberry County, which is comprised of 647 square miles, covering seven municipalities to include Little Mountain, Peak, Pomaria, Prosperity, Silverstreet, Whitmire and the City of Newberry. Unincorporated areas of Newberry County are comprised of Chappells, Jalapa and parts of Kinards. The population of Newberry County is 38,443, with the largest population being located in the unincorporated areas, and the second largest being located in the City of Newberry. As the commercial center of this county, City of Newberry is home of numerous of business and institutions, including Newberry College.



**NEWBERRY COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

Coroner

Laura G. Kneece, F-ABMDI



Chief Deputy

Kevin Worley



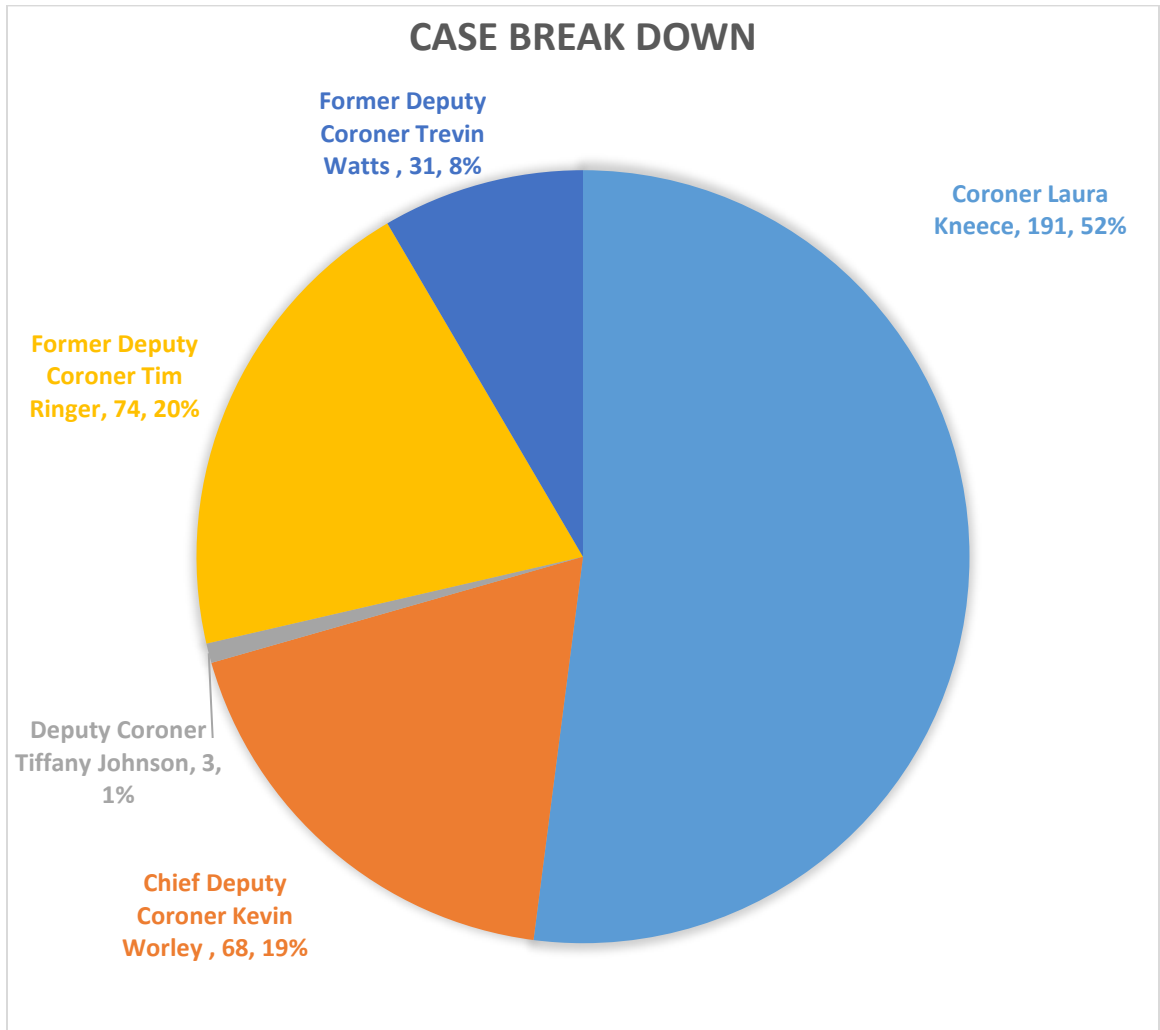
Present Deputy Coroner

Tiffany Johnson

Former Deputy Coroners

Timothy Ringer

Trevin Watts



INVESTIGATION AND DISPOSITION OF CASES

All deaths reported to the Coroner's Office are handled according to the circumstances of death which generally funnel into one of four ways.

First, the Coroner may assume jurisdiction over the death, conduct an investigation, and order an autopsy to determine cause and manner of death.

Second, the Coroner may assume jurisdiction of a death and conduct an investigation, but not order an autopsy.

Third, if the death is due to natural disease and if a private physician who has treated the decedent is confident in his/her opinion as to the cause of death, the Coroner may transfer jurisdiction to the private physician to sign the Death Certificate.

Finally, even though a death may have occurred in Newberry County, a "transfer of jurisdiction" may occur to the Coroner of the county where the initiating event causing death occurred.

The following description is a general overview of the processes during a full investigation and the follow-up.

Upon arrival at a death scene, the Coroner or Deputy Coroner will speak with first responders, law enforcement officers and any witnesses to become familiar with the circumstances surrounding the incident and any safety considerations that need to be taken prior to entering the immediate scene. The Coroner or the Deputy Coroner will take notes and utilize photographs and/or video to further document the scene. They will also collect and preserve all evidence and any personal property on or around the body/remains. In some crime scene situations, the Coroner or Deputy Coroner will coordinate with law enforcement officers regarding the collection of evidence. Any evidence and/or personal property collected by the Coroner or Deputy Coroner is secured and documented until it can be processed or appropriately turned over to the legal next-of-kin.

The Coroner or Deputy Coroner makes every effort to identify the decedent utilizing at least two forms of the following methods: Government issued photo ID of the decedent that matches decedent's physical characteristics/features; fingerprint analysis; DNA analysis; coordination of odontology examination (dental X-rays); coordination of forensic anthropology analysis (skeleton/bones); comparison of significant scars, marks and tattoos; birth defects, and presence of prosthetics.

After processing the scene, the Coroner or Deputy Coroner must make a decision on the transportation of the decedent depending on the circumstances surrounding the death. If the decision is made to further investigate (autopsy, external examination, toxicology), the Coroner or Deputy Coroner will transport the decedent to the morgue. If no further investigation is needed and the legal next-of-kin has a funeral home selected, that particular funeral home is contacted to pick up the decedent. The Coroner's Office is currently responsible for decedent transportation. For the year of 2019, the Coroner's Office transported 60 decedents.

If the Coroner or Deputy Coroner deem it necessary to conduct a post mortem examination, they notify the contracted autopsy vendor, which is Newberry Pathology Group. This Office also notifies the involved agencies, i.e. law enforcement of the autopsy time. The collection and preservation of any and all evidence rendered from an autopsy is of utmost importance to the investigation.

The Coroner or Deputy Coroner makes every effort to identify, locate and notify, in person, the legal next-of-kin of the death. This Office also facilitates the release of the remains to the funeral home selected by the next-of-kin or has a policy in place for unclaimed (indigent) decedents. The Coroner's Office had one (1) unclaimed/indigent decedent for the year 2019.

The Coroner's Office is responsible for obtaining a complete medical history of both the present event, if applicable and all past medical history which might have some relationship to the death. This office thoroughly documents all the information gathered through the investigation in a written report and collects all documents related to a death in a case file. Upon request, the Coroner's Office provides copies of their investigation case file to the Solicitor's Office, the Public Defender's Office and involved law enforcement agencies.

Sixty (60) complete forensic autopsies were ordered 2019. The cases that were not autopsies were those in which the scene investigation, circumstances of death, medical documentation, interviews, social history, and/or external examination of the body provided sufficient information for certifying the cause of death.

Included in all autopsies and in some cases where external examination only is performed, toxicology tests may be helpful in determining the cause and manner of death. Toxicology testing is performed on various specimens collected at autopsy/external examination. Either a nationally accredited lab such as NMS, Forensic Science Network, or the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) crime lab is used for toxicology testing. Screening tests include alcohol, illicit drugs, commonly abused prescription and nonprescription drugs, and other substance as needed. For the year of 2019, 58 cases were sent to SLED; 0 cases were sent to NMS Labs; and 3 cases were sent to Forensic Science Network for toxicology testing.

MANNER OF DEATH

The **Manner of Death** is a classification of the way in which the Cause of Death came about, whether by force of natural events, accidental means, self-inflicted, or other external forces. Manner of death is determined largely by means of the investigation. There are only five (5) manners of death which are listed below.

NATURAL: Death caused by disease. If natural death is hastened by injury or any other non-natural event (ex: fall), the manner of death will not be considered natural. If the terminal disease process is by a non-natural event (ex: pneumonia due to long-term bed confinement), the manner of death will not be considered natural.

SUICIDE: Death as a result of a purposeful action set in motion (explicit or implicit) to end's one life.

ACCIDENT: Death other than natural where there is no evidence of intent; i.e. an unintentional event or chain of events. This category includes most motor vehicle collisions, falls, drownings, accidental drug overdoses, drug reactions, etc.

HOMICIDE: Death resulting from injuries intentionally inflicted by another person (explicit or implicit), or inflicted on another by one's grossly reckless behavior (does not include vehicular homicide).

UNDETERMINED: Manner assigned when there is insufficient evidence, or conflicting/equivocal information (especially about intent), to assign a specific manner (ex: found skeletal remains, where no other clear manner of death can be determined).

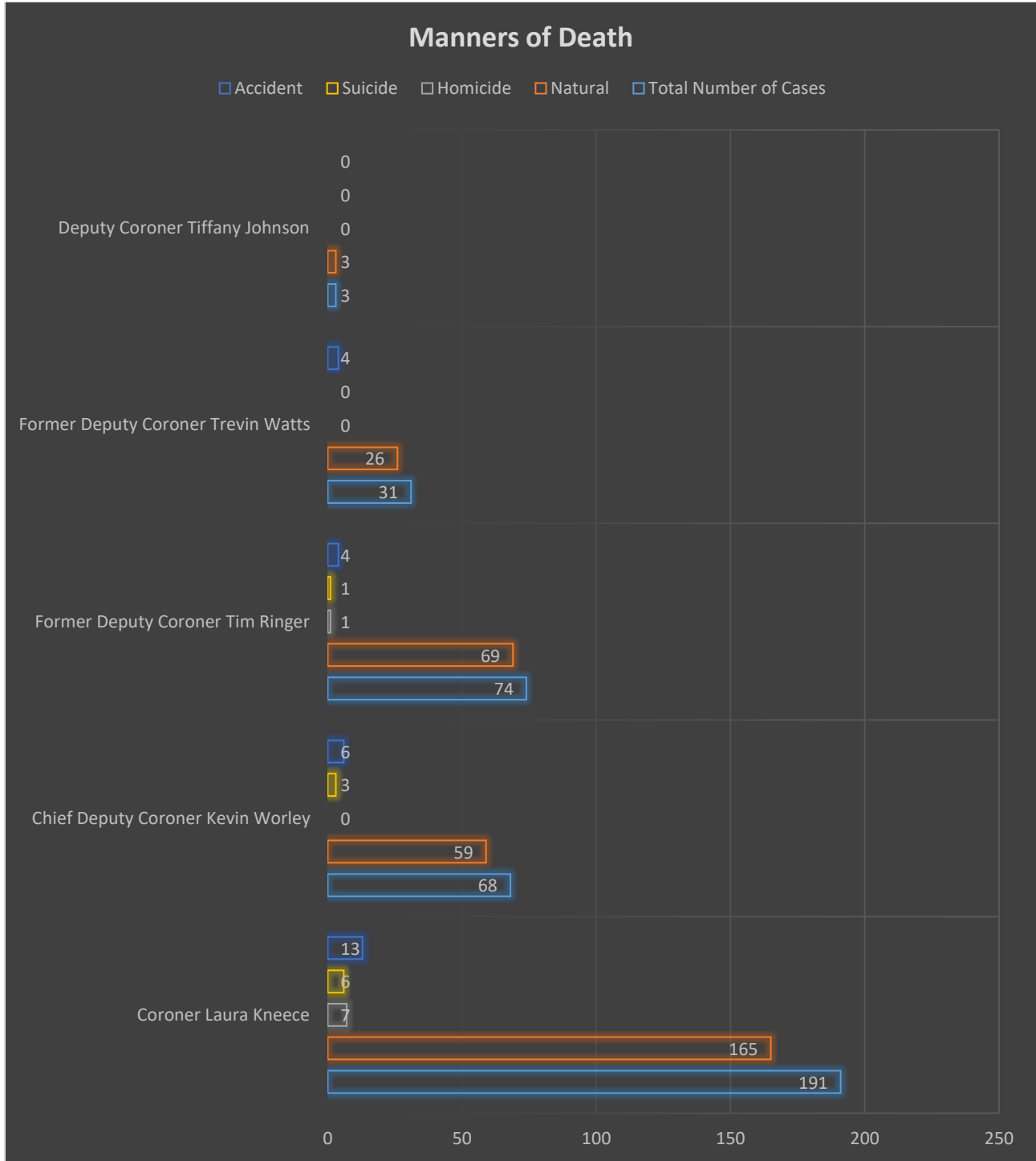
STATISTICS

In 2019, the Newberry County Coroner's Office had involvement in 356 (1.00% increase from 2018) deaths in various degrees.

Regarding those deaths:

- ❖ 318 were classified as Natural
- ❖ 23 were classified as Accident
- ❖ 8 were classified as Suicide
- ❖ 7 were classified as Homicide
- ❖ 0 were classified Undetermined

In addition to these deaths, the Coroner's Office had involvement to various degrees with 137 requests for other services including cremation permits, which generated \$3350.00 of revenue, and requests to make notification to next-of-kin by other jurisdictions.



Disclaimer: For training purposes, in some cases more than one coroner was present making the total number of cases (356) not equal to when each individuals total cases are added up (367).