

Narrowing down a match

Genealogy expert to discuss DNA at local discussion group

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Countless individuals receive DNA results every day, but what exactly do they mean?

With the help of renowned genealogist Dana Leeds, one local organization is doing their part to help the community understand this sometimes complicated report.



Leeds

The Walker County Genealogical Society's DNA Interest Group will host

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Leeds on Jan. 16 for a discussion on color clustering, a concept that the former biology teacher recently developed. The event will be held from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Johnnie Jo Sowell Dickenson Genealogy Room of the Huntsville Public Library.

"We had a genealogy weekend back in August, and Dana was one of the speakers," said Janet Miller, second vice president of the Walker County Genealogical Society. "Since then, she has really taken off with her color clustering method. It's gotten quite a bit of attention. We're delighted that we'll be able to have her here to talk to our group."

When an individual receives a DNA result, it shows their origin — the countries where their ancestors came from — as well as a list of DNA matches. Color clustering deals with the latter.

"Color clustering has to do with the DNA matches," Leeds said. "Those are people who are related to you

and the DNA is showing that. Color clustering is a way to easily group those people into clusters that are most likely related. Most people will get four groups based on their four grandparents.

"The neat thing about it is — I actually developed it with an adoptee — you don't have to know anything about your family or cousins or who these people are. It's just built into how the DNA works that you can cluster these people."

One of greatest benefits of color clustering compared to other methods of analysis is the ability to drastically and efficiently narrow down the pool of matches. For Leeds, all it takes is 10 to 15 minutes of entering names in an Excel spreadsheet to make a significant impact.

"People use a lot of different ways to get at that, but this is just a much more systemized way where you can say, 'OK, these are the cousins I need to look at, and I need to look at their trees,'" Leeds said. "A lot of us have 1,000 or more matches. That's really hard to look at. If you do color clustering, you might have a group of 30 people, and you can work

with 30 people."

The DNA Interest Group began in September and has gradually grown since then, aiming to help individuals understand their roots and who they are connected to. Community members, regardless of knowledge level or if they have taken a DNA test, are encouraged to attend this special event.

"Everyone is welcome," Miller said. "Many of us are beginners, and some of us have been around it a little longer, but it's just a way that we can exchange ideas and learn from each other."

The Walker County Genealogical Society meets on the third Saturday of each month in the Community Room of the Huntsville Public Library. In addition to the DNA Interest Group, the organization sponsors various monthly discussion groups, as well as annual events such as the "Winter Lock-In" in February and a two-day "Summer Weekend" in August.

For more information on the Walker County Genealogical Society and its programs, visit www.wcgen.com.