



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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**PRESS RELEASE**

6/27/17

**CUTLER MAN CONVICTED IN 1996 MURDER**

Today in Department 5 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Judge Joseph Kalashian presiding, a Tulare County jury convicted Mario Villa, 54, of Cutler, of first degree murder with the special allegation of personal use of a firearm.

On January 1, 1996, the victim drove to a friend's house to celebrate the New Year and was immediately attacked by a group of men in the street. He was beaten, bound, and transported out of town to a canal where Mario Villa shot the defenseless man multiple times in the head, killing him. The group then attempted to burn the body to cover up the crime.

Later on New Year's Day, a motorist saw what he thought was a victim of a traffic accident collapsed along the side of the road. When firefighters responded, they roused the man, and while doing so, happened upon the murdered victim's body just a few yards away. The would-be traffic accident victim turned out to be one of the assailants, too incapacitated to flee the scene of the murder that took place just a few hours prior. Once revived, he led law enforcement to the others involved, including Mario Villa.

Later that year, Mario Villa was found to be incompetent to stand trial. When he was finally declared competent two decades later, accountability for the murder of an innocent man was waiting. The value of the life lost was not forgotten and Mario Villa now faces 35 years to life in prison.

Sentencing is set for July 26, 2017 in Department 5 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division.

The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Wendy Sedillo and investigated by Investigator Mark Lopez from the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations and the Tulare County Sheriff's Office.

*Media inquiries can be directed to the Office of the District Attorney, County of Tulare  
Assistant District Attorney Kerri Lopez (559) 636-5494*