



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

PRESS RELEASE

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**STRATHMORE GANG MEMBER FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER, JURY
RETURNS VERDICT OF DEATH**

Today in Department 10 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Judge Kathryn Montejano presiding, a jury reached a verdict of death for Northern gang member Eric Jimenez, age 33, of Strathmore, following a June 13, 2018, conviction for multiple murders. Jimenez was found guilty of first-degree murder with the special circumstances that the murder was committed in the commission of a robbery, that the crime was committed for a criminal street gang, and that the murder was part of multiple murders. Jimenez was also found guilty second-degree murder with the special allegation that the crime was committed for a street gang, one count of conspiracy to commit murder, one count of conspiracy to dissuade a witness, one count of dissuading a witness, one count of first-degree residential robbery, and one count of vehicle theft. Each count is a felony.

Jimenez possesses five prior felony convictions: carrying a concealed, loaded firearm in 2004, possession of methamphetamine with intent to sell in 2005, felony vandalism in 2008, possession of a deadly weapon in custody in 2008, and false personation and possession of brass knuckles in 2012. Jimenez's gang moniker was "Psycho."

In the late evening of March 28, 2012, Jimenez and fellow gang member Matthew Campos, age 28, walked in to the Porterville garage of Jimenez's girlfriend, Raquel Espinosa, age 29, who was talking to the 39-year-old male victim. Jimenez knew the victim often carried money and drugs. After a brief exchange, Jimenez pistol whipped the victim and held his hands while Campos struck him with brass knuckles. Jimenez demanded Espinosa retrieve an electrical cord, which was then used to strangle the victim to death.

Jimenez and Campos robbed the victim of drugs and money before they rolled him up in a carpet and put him in the extended cab of his own truck. Jimenez and Campos

departed in the truck, with Jimenez dropping Campos off at his residence before eventually continuing on to a private mechanic shed on a property outside Porterville. At the shed, Jimenez placed the victim's body in a service pit, poured gasoline over the body, and ignited it. The owner of the property saw smoke and notified the authorities.

On April 23, 2012, Jimenez was contacted by Porterville Police Department officers and was found to be in possession of brass knuckles and was put in custody. On May 25, 2012, Campos, who had spoken about the crime to friends, was arrested along with Espinosa. After these arrests, Jimenez became concerned about several individuals who he believed would implicate him in the murder. While in custody, Jimenez conspired to murder one of these individuals, a 19-year-old male. Jimenez was charged with the first murder on August 20, 2012, and was arraigned on the second murder on October 9, 2013.

Matthew Campos was convicted of second-degree murder on November 9, 2017, and sentenced to 16 years-to-life in prison. Raquel Espinoza pleaded to accessory after the fact and is awaiting sentencing on June 27, 2018.

The murder trial for Jimenez began on April 23, 2018, with jurors deliberating for eight hours before reaching a verdict. The penalty phase with the same jury began on June 18, 2018, and deliberated for four hours before reaching a death verdict. The jury was comprised of ten men and two women. Further motions will be heard in August prior to sentencing.

"The death penalty is not something to be taken lightly. It is reserved for the most heinous, callous, and depraved crimes imaginable," said District Attorney Tim Ward. "I am grateful to law enforcement and prosecutors for working tirelessly and investing countless hours to secure justice for the families of the victims."

The case was prosecuted by Supervising Deputy District Attorney Melissa Chabra and investigated by Tulare County Sheriff's Department Sergeants Steve Sanchez and Frank Zaragoza, as well as Criminal Investigator Jerry Hunziger of the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations.

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