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News from the Office of District Attorney Tori Verber Salazar

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MAN SENTENCED TO 120 YEARS TO LIFE IN PRISON FOR MURDER OF GOOD SAMARITAN WHO CAME TO AID DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM

Stockton – Today, District Attorney Tori Verber Salazar announced that the Honorable Charlotte Orcutt sentenced Jesse Adrian Esparza, age 24, to 120 years to life in state prison on January 6, 2020, for the murder of victim, Ricardo Valenzuela, Jr., and the attempted murders of Ernesto and Thomas Valenzuela, on Valentines’ Day 2017. This crime occurred in the 1600 block of Bonaire Circle. Mr. Esparza was also sentenced for a prior robbery and attempted murder he committed in 2016. Mr. Esparza will be eligible for his first parole board hearing after serving 25 actual years in prison because of the ‘youthful offender’ law codified in Penal Code §3051.”

“A man who aided and abetted a robbery; who was illegally in possession of a firearm due to a prior felony conviction; who beat the mother of his child in the middle of the street; and who ultimately killed a man in cold-blood because he dared to come to her aid, is off the street, and San Joaquin County is much safer for it. I have vowed to prosecute the drivers of crime in this county, in particular, those who use firearms to kill,” said District Attorney Verber Salazar. “As stated in the San Joaquin County District Office’s year-end report, firearm violence accounts for over 80% of homicides and is prevalent in domestic violence and gang situations. This office has a zero tolerance policy for this type of callous bloodshed, and will prosecute perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law.”

According to court records, the robbery occurred on January 16th, 2016, when an unidentified person ran out of the Delta Liquor Store on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard with a case of beer. When store employee, Tony Galabis, gave chase, the defendant shot him through the arm, leaving a bullet lodged behind his heart where it remains to this day. Jesse Esparza made good

his escape. Law enforcement subsequently identified Jesse Esparza as the shooter from video footage attained at the scene.

Fast forward to Valentine's Day 2017 in the area of Bonaire Court where the Valenzuela family had gathered for a memorial service for another family member. Their celebration of life was interrupted by the piercing screams of a woman emanating from down the street. The three Valenzuela men, two of whom were brothers, could not help themselves but to go to her aid.

According to trial testimony, the woman was cowering below a man who stood over her. As the three men approached, the man pulled a gun from his waistband and pointed it at the group. The man began to fire upon them and chased them down as they ran for their lives. Ernest Valenzuela was shot four times, but survived his injuries.

Ricardo Valenzuela tried to hide behind a vehicle, but the gunman gave chase and rapidly fired into him ensuring his execution. The police arrived to the area and an all-night standoff with a SWAT-team ensued. Eventually the woman and several children emerged from the home, but, again, Mr. Esparza made good his escape

Ultimately, he was apprehended and brought to trial. According to court records, the woman whose cries for help brought the Good Samaritans from their home, married Jesse Esparza as he remained incarcerated at the San Joaquin County Jail awaiting trial. She testified at trial that she and the defendant were arguing outside when the men approached, but she ran inside and claimed to have not seen the shooting. However, a neighbor's Ring doorbell system captured the murder on video. "It is quite disturbing to watch," commented District Attorney Verber Salazar.

A piece of bloody gauze was and tested for DNA. It matched the DNA of Mr. Esparza. Mr. Esparza can be seen on Snapchat videos earlier that day in similar clothing as the shooter on the Ring video and with a gauze bandage on his finger as he proudly brandishes a firearm.

It took law enforcement almost two years to capture the defendant.

It took a San Joaquin County jury less than a day to convict him.

On November 11, 2019, Jesse Esparza was convicted of First Degree Murder (P.C. §187(a)), three counts of Attempted Murder (P.C. §664/187(a)), Robbery (P.C. §211), and found to have personally used a firearm in the commission of a violent felony (P.C. §§12022.53(c) and (d)). He was also convicted of being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm (P.C. §29800(a)).

A special thank you to Detective Andrew Donovan with the Stockton Police Department Homicide Unit who aggressively investigated the case and to Deputy District Attorney Donald Vaughn, who successfully prosecuted the matter. "We are saddened by the Valenzuela family's loss, but recognize these men as heroes. It is important to let the citizens of San Joaquin County know that we take our commitment to public safety seriously and will do everything in our power to protect this community."

