



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

PRESS RELEASE

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CUTLER MAN SENTENCED FOR 1996 NEW YEAR'S DAY MURDER

Today in Department 5 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Judge Joseph Kalashian sentenced Mario Villa, 54, of Cutler, to 29 years to life in prison for murder. On June 27, 2016, a Tulare County jury convicted Villa 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 in Orosi 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 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 Villa. Later that year, Villa was found to be incompetent to stand trial and was not found competent until nearly two decades later.

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.

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