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**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: CDDA Birgit Fladager

Date: 03/15/06

Re: SALVADOR GUZMAN ALVAREZ

Phone: (209)525-5550

MODESTO, CALIFORNIA – The Stanislaus County District Attorney’s Office announced today that Salvador Guzman Alvarez, age 22, of Modesto, was convicted of murder on March 15, 2006 following a jury trial. Deputy District Attorney Shawn D. Bessey prosecuted the case for the People.

The case arose out of events that occurred early in the morning on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003. Richard “Rick” Lopez, Jr., age 38, a contractor from Modesto, gave Salvador Guzman Alvarez a ride home in the early morning hours from a party on the South Side of Modesto. Unknown to Lopez, Alvarez was a member of the Norteno criminal street gang that claims Deep South Side Modesto. Alvarez was able to talk Lopez into giving him a ride home. Just before leaving the gathering, Alvarez told a fellow gang member that he was going to “jack” Lopez. “Jack” is a term used by gang members that means to commit robbery.

Thirty minutes later, the body of Rick Lopez was found in the parking lot of an apartment complex off of Crows Landing Road. Alvarez lived behind the apartment complex. Rick Lopez had been shot twice in the head at close range according to Dr. Robert Lawrence of Delta Pathology. Through physical evidence in the form of blood spatter, shell casings and bullet trajectory, it was determined by investigators that Mr. Lopez was killed in his truck by someone in the passenger seat.

Anonymous tips lead Det. Jon Buehler of the Modesto Police Dept. to the defendant Salvador Alvarez. Although witnesses were reluctant to come forward, statements were eventually obtained by Det. Buehler and Investigator Kirk Bunch of the Stanislaus County District Attorney’s Office.

A number of witnesses testified against Alvarez in the two-and-half-week trial that started on February 27th. The evidence portion of the case was completed on Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>. The jury deliberated for about two hours on Wednesday morning before returning verdicts of guilty of 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder with the special circumstances of robbery and committing the murder for the benefit of a criminal street gang. The jury also found true a special allegation that the defendant personally discharged a gun causing death during the commission of the murder. The defendant was also found guilty of robbery for the benefit of the gang and use of a gun.

The defendant's sentencing will take place on April 12<sup>th</sup> in front of Superior Court Judge Nancy Ashley. The murder charge carries a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.