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**PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

**For More Information Contact:**

Date: **August 12, 2008**

Carol Shipley, Assistant District Attorney

Re: **Gang member convicted of “provocative act” murder**

Phone: (209) 525-5550

Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that **Felix “Gato” Lopez, age 33**, was convicted today by a Stanislaus County jury of the murder of his gang associate, **Michael Valles**, who died as a result of gunshot wounds fired by the intended target of a gang assassination. Deputy District Attorney Thomas Brennan prosecuted the case for the People.

On January 26, 2004, **Lopez**, a Northern Structure prison gang member, entered the “Pushing Ink” Tattoo parlor in Modesto together with **Valles**, also a recently paroled Northern Structure prison gang member. **Lopez** was armed with a loaded .45 caliber pistol. **Lopez** was enforcing a “hit” that he had placed on the intended target back in 1998 when the intended target fell out of favor with the Norteno Criminal Street Gang. The “Northern Structure” is a prison gang affiliated with the Nuestra Familia prison gang. The Northern Structure acts as the enforcement arm of the Nuestra Familia in California prisons. Northern Structure prison gang members who are paroled onto the streets maintain high status within the Norteno Criminal Street Gang and are often referred to as “shot callers” on the streets.

The intended target knew that **Lopez** was after him and armed himself with two loaded firearms for protection. When **Lopez** entered the Tattoo Parlor he stated to **Valles**, “*That is (intended target)...he is no good.*” The term “no good” in criminal street gang language means the person is targeted for immediate assault. When **Lopez** reached for his pistol, the target opened fire with his two firearms, killing **Valles** and seriously injuring **Lopez**. **Lopez** exited the Tattoo Parlor and fired 8 rounds from his .45 at the Tattoo shop, striking the intended target once in the foot.

**Lopez** was charged with “provoking” a deadly response from the intended target by entering the Tattoo Parlor with a loaded firearm, declaring to his gang companion “he is no good” and drawing his firearm in an aggressive manner. The jury convicted **Lopez** of Murder, Shooting into an Occupied Dwelling, being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm, and Witness Intimidation, all crimes conferring a benefit on the Norteno Criminal Street Gang.

Sentencing is scheduled for September 26, 2008 in Department 9 before the Honorable Scott Steffen. Lopez faces three consecutive life terms in state prison.