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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Carol Shipley

Date: April 15, 2011

Assistant District Attorney

Re: Steven Lee Melendrez & Cory Lee Kerns

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**Auto Thief Couple
Gets Sentenced**

Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Steven Lee Melendrez, age 34, and Cory Lee Kerns, age 25, both of Modesto, were convicted on April 15, 2011 of auto theft. Kerns was also convicted of possession of methamphetamine. Both Melendrez and Kerns had previously attended court-ordered drug treatment programs after separate auto theft and narcotics possession convictions in October 2005 and had their cases dismissed per statute upon completion of their treatment programs. Deputy District Attorney Jeff Mangar prosecuted the case for the People.

On February 24, 2011 during the early morning hours in an apartment complex on Coffee Road in Modesto, Kerns drove Melendrez to a parked 1990 white Honda Accord. Melendrez then jumped into the Accord and drove it a few blocks and parked it. He then took the stereo out of the Accord and was picked up by Kerns, abandoning the Accord on the side of the road. This stereo was later recovered in the garage of Melendrez and Kerns. Melendrez boasted to the officers that it took him “8 seconds” to break into the car and start it.

On February 28, 2011 during the early morning hours in the area of Bridgeford Lane in Modesto, Kerns drove Melendrez to a parked 1993 white Honda Civic. Melendrez then jumped into the Civic and drove it a few blocks and parked it. He then took the amplifier out of the trunk and left the Civic abandoned in an alley. Kerns then picked him up and they drove off.

On March 4, 2011 during the early morning hours in an apartment complex on Ronald Avenue in Modesto, Kerns drove Melendrez to a parked 1996 white Honda Civic. Melendrez then jumped into the Civic and drove off. After driving it a few blocks, Melendrez did not like the sound the engine was making so he abandoned the Civic on the side of the road. Kerns then picked Melendrez up.

On March 6, 2011, officers from the Stanislaus County Auto-Theft Task Force (StanCATT) received a tip that Melendrez and Kerns were staying on MacGregor Court in Modesto. When officers arrived there they made contact with the two. Melendrez admitted to the auto thefts. When officers interviewed Kerns about helping Melendrez steal the three cars, she stated that she'll do "whatever he tells me to do." Both Melendrez and Kerns were then arrested. Kerns was found to be in possession of methamphetamine and a glass smoking pipe.

The Honorable Dawna Frenchie Reeves sentenced Melendrez to four years and four months in state prison. The Honorable Scott Steffen sentenced Kerns to two years in the California Rehabilitation Center.

Stanislaus County residents can report suspected vehicle theft activity to their local law enforcement agency or contact the Stanislaus County Auto-Theft Task Force (StanCATT) at: (209) 545-7316.

IF YOU OBSERVE A THEFT IN PROGRESS, DIAL 911

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