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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Carol Shipley, ADA

Date: January 14, 2008

Re: Paul Michael Ruiz

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Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Paul Michael Ruiz, age 33, of Modesto, was convicted by a jury of receiving a stolen car. The jury trial, conducted by the Honorable Scott T. Steffen of the Superior Court, started on Wednesday, January 9th and concluded on Thursday, January 10th. Following the jury verdict, on Friday, January 11th, in a court trial, Judge Steffen found true three special allegations: (1) Mr. Ruiz suffered a prior conviction for residential burglary which is a “strike” under the Three Strikes Law, (2) Mr. Ruiz committed the current offense within five years of his release from state prison following a completed prison term for false personation and possession of methamphetamine, and (3) Mr. Ruiz committed the current offense while he was released on bail on a prior case in which he was charged with several felonies. (In that prior case, he was convicted by a jury on October 9, 2007, of several felonies, and he is awaiting sentencing.)

The case arose out of events which occurred on February 28, 2005. At about 7:30 a.m., on Orange Blossom Road outside Oakdale, Mr. Ruiz was driving a car which had been stolen just 10 days earlier in Modesto. He had a single passenger, Rayanne Hawkins. An eyewitness watched as Mr. Ruiz veered off the road and crashed into a utility pole, causing the pole to fall onto the roadway, blocking both lanes of travel. Both Ruiz and Hawkins, who identified herself as “Sarah Ann VanWinkle”, told an investigating officer that Hawkins was the driver, but physical evidence, which included long strands of Ms. Hawkins’s hair stuck to the interior of the windshield on the passenger’s side, belied this. The investigating officers were able to determine that the car had been stolen despite the fact that the car had been repainted, the public VIN plate on the dash had been replaced, identifying information from the driver’s door and the engine had been removed, and the passenger door, trunk lid and license plate had all been replaced. The stolen car, a Saturn,

was being driven with a Toyota ignition key which had been modified to work in the Saturn. Such keys are commonly referred to as "shaved keys." Mr. Ruiz had two more modified vehicle keys in his pants pocket and two more modified keys were located on a key ring on the floorboard of the car.

Mr. Ruiz is now awaiting sentencing on this case (Stanislaus County Case Number 1088708). His next court date is February 19, 2008. Ms. Hawkins, whose true identity was determined through her fingerprints, previously pled guilty to receiving this stolen car and was sentenced to 150 days in jail as a term of felony probation on August 11, 2005.

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