



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Stanislaus County
832 12th Street, Suite 300
Modesto, CA 95354
Mailing address: POB 442, Modesto, CA 95353
Telephone: (209) 525-5550 Fax: (209) 525-5545

Birgit Fladager
District Attorney
Carol Shipley
Assistant District Attorney
Chief Deputy District Attorneys
Jerry Begen
Alan Cassidy
Dave Harris

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: May 15, 2009
Re: Kawamoto Sentencing

For More Information Contact:

Doug Maner, Deputy District Attorney
Phone: (209) 525-5550

Modesto, California – Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Darren Kawamoto, age 44, a registered sex offender, was sentenced to 36 years to life in prison. He had previously been found guilty of six counts of Criminal Threats and five enhancements of personally using a deadly weapon while committing those crimes. Kawamoto had previously been convicted of five prior serious felony convictions with two prior prison commitments. Deputy District Attorney Doug Maner prosecuted this case for the People.

Kawamoto's attorney asked the court to dismiss all of his previous serious felony (strike) convictions and sentence Kawamoto to 16 months in prison. Kawamoto told the probation department that it was the media's fault for antagonizing him, and the Oakdale Police Department's fault for misrepresenting the nature of his prior convictions, complaining that this was 'redneck justice' that was done in Oakdale. Judge Ricardo Cordova was not swayed by these pleas and imposed one of the two life sentences that the District Attorney's Office requested.

After being released from prison for his prior convictions, Kawamoto relocated to the Oakdale/Riverbank area in November of 2008. Kawamoto was required to register his current address due to his status as a sex offender pursuant to Penal Code 290. He registered with the Oakdale Police Department on November 6, 2008 as a transient sex offender with no fixed address. He was also listed on the State of California's "Megan's Law" website. The victims of his previous crimes and the general community were concerned that he had returned to their neighborhood and afraid that he would commit further offenses. A neighborhood meeting with local law enforcement was scheduled at the Oakdale Community Center on November 11, 2008 to address those concerns. News crews consisting of a reporter and a cameraman from TV stations 3(KCRA), 10(News10) and 40(Fox) were dispatched to cover this event. The TV crews learned that Kawamoto was residing at his mother's house in Oakdale and went there to interview him.

Kawamoto opened the front door and launched on a several minute tirade of verbal abuse and insults to the three news crews. During this tirade, multiple death threats were directed at the six reporters and cameramen present. These included threats to cut the throat of the cameramen, and also issued threats to all 5 victims to "track down every one of you and kill you, a life for life sentence." In between the first and second threats, a relative intervened and pulled Kawamoto away. He walked away for a moment, then returned with a box-cutter, re-approached the victims, and brandished it before, during and after the second threats.

The victims withdrew from the front porch area after the first threat and began to depart. They were outside of the front yard when the second threat occurred. They then called 911 and their station representatives and packed up their gear. There was a brief delay in their departure as they discussed whether to wait for the police or to depart. While this was occurring, Kawamoto came out of the shadows and began to move aggressively towards them, asking them where they lived, what they did, what they were doing there. At this point, they got in their vans and left.

Kawamoto was previously sentenced to 25 years in prison for violent sexual offenses that he committed in Oakdale in 1987. He was released from prison in 2004. He remained on parole the maximum time possible. He had violated his parole and been returned to prison four separate times. In 1983, Kawamoto was convicted in Alameda County of Residential Burglary and Assault with a Deadly Weapon and imprisoned for seven years.

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