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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: August 23, 2012
Re: Darren Merenda #1408049

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Darren Jack Merenda, age 33, of Turlock, was finally sentenced August 10, 2012 to 25 years to life for the 1st degree murder of Donald Deane Futch, of Hughson. Merenda was convicted in October 2011 after a two-week jury trial. Deputy District Attorney Annette Rees prosecuted the case for the People.

Merenda moved into an apartment in Turlock in February of 2009 where he met a woman who was his neighbor. They began dating. She broke off the relationship with Merenda and began dating Futch on July 9, 2009. Merenda continued to pursue a relationship with her.

In the early morning hours of September 12, 2011, Merenda sent two text messages to the woman after seeing her and Futch at Staley's bar in Turlock. She did not respond, however Futch responded back to Merenda. After an exchange of texts, Futch called Merenda, and told him to meet them outside to talk. Futch was not armed, however, Merenda had a 10-inch, double-blade dagger hidden under his shirt. When Futch turned to walk toward the alley, Merenda pulled his dagger and stabbed Futch a total of 11 times. Futch died at the scene. Dr. Baik, the forensic medical examiner who testified at the trial, explained that one of the fatal wounds was 13 inches deep into Futch's chest.

"This was cold blooded murder," argued Rees. "For eight minutes he thought about the fact that Donnie was with her, they were together in her apartment, and Donnie was getting in the way of his connection to her," Rees told the jury last year. But today, "almost three years to the day after this brutal and premeditated murder, Donnie Futch's family and friends have some amount of closure and justice. His children, of course, will never be made whole," said Rees. Judge Dawna Reeves sentenced Merenda to serve 25 years to life in prison. There is no good time credit for murder; the defendant will serve the full 25 years before being eligible for parole.

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