



DISTRICT ATTORNEY
LARRY D. MORSE II

550 W. Main Street
Merced, CA 95340
Phone (209) 385-7381
Fax (209) 725-3669

Chief Deputy District Attorney
HAROLD L. NUTT

Chief Deputy District Attorney
ROBERT O. CARROLL

Director of Administrative Services
JEANNETTE M. PACHECO

INVESTIGATIONS
(209) 385-7383

Chief Investigator
WILLIAM K. OLSON

VICTIM WITNESS
(209) 385-7385

Victim Witness Program Director
LISA DeSANTIS

LOS BANOS DIVISION

445 I Street
Los Banos, CA 93635
Phone (209) 710-6070
Fax (209) 827-2029

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May 9, 2018

For More Information Contact:
Amanda McCoy (209) 628-1646

**MERCED COUNTY “MUCH SAFER” ONE YEAR AFTER
OPERATION “SCRAPBOOK”**

One year after a gang sweep he termed “the most successful in Merced County history,” District Attorney Larry D. Morse II said today that “Merced County remains much safer as a result of Operation Scrapbook.”

In a one-year anniversary review of the criminal prosecutions that resulted from the May 10, 2017 sweep of Sureno gang members operating in Merced County and state prisons, Morse noted that 79 defendants were implicated in Operation Scrapbook. In Merced County, there have been 34 convictions, 21 cases are still pending in the court system, and one defendant resolved their case by admitting a violation of probation. One defendant remains at large with an active warrant for his arrest. Fourteen defendants were charged with felonies in federal court and three defendants were referred to San Joaquin County for prosecution, Morse said. Five of those arrested were ultimately not charged with crimes, he added.

Out of the 34 convictions in Merced County, 18 have been sentenced to prison and at least three will be spending the rest of their lives in prison, Morse said.

Following an investigation that began in early 2017, more than 500 federal, state and local law enforcement personnel gathered in Merced County on May 10th to serve arrest and search warrants throughout the county on suspected Sureno gang members and some who were conducting gang business in county jail and in state prisons. By day’s end law enforcement officials had recovered more than 120 firearms, including dozens of assault weapons, seized 21,000 rounds of ammunition, \$225,000 in cash and six and a half pounds of methamphetamine, Morse said, adding that the entire operation was concluded without any injuries to law enforcement or those targeted for arrest.

“Operation Scrapbook not only took violent and dangerous gang members off our streets, the seizure of so many high powered guns and ammunition

undoubtedly saved innocent lives, including law enforcement officers who very likely would have been confronting these well-armed gangsters at some point,” Morse said.

Based on information gathered through this investigation from MAGNET, (Merced Area Gang and Narcotics Enforcement Team) and the District Attorney’s VIPER intelligence unit, local law enforcement was able to gather information on at least eight homicides and violent assaults and prevented at least a dozen additional violent crimes, Morse noted.

Merced County’s homicide rate had topped 30 per year between 2013 and 2015, much of it gang related, and making the county one of top three deadliest in California. In the aftermath of 2014’s Operation Red Right Hand, which targeted Norteno gang members in Merced County and resulted in more than 50 arrests, gang investigators noted an increase in rival Sureno gang activity, Morse said, which led to Operation Scrapbook.

Morse said results from the two major gang sweeps have been dramatic. In 2016, there were only nine reported homicides in Merced County. In 2017 there were 19, but only three were gang related, he noted. Overall, Morse said, homicides in Merced County have been reduced by half in the last two years and gang violence is down dramatically as a result of both Operation Red Right Hand and Operation Scrapbook.

“Working closely with Sheriff Vern Warnke, the police chiefs and our allied agencies, and utilizing the intelligence gathering capabilities we’ve developed through the VIPER program, we have made significant progress in reducing gang violence in Merced County,” Morse said, adding, “it’s a trend intend to continue.”