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**MERCED MAN FOUND GUILTY OF THREE COUNTS OF
FIRST DEGREE MURDER**

On December 7, 2018, a Merced County jury found Pete Valenzuela guilty of three counts of first degree murder, one count of first degree attempted murder and a count of assault with a semi-automatic handgun, along with various special circumstance allegations and enhancements. Valenzuela is scheduled to be sentenced on January 4, 2019 and is facing a sentence of life without the possibility of parole.

The case stems from several incidents occurring in 2012. The first was the murder of Antonio Jacobo on October 7, 2012 on West 6th Street between T and S, in front of Sheehy Elementary School. Pete Valenzuela shot Jacobo multiple times with a semi-automatic pistol. That case remained unsolved with Merced Police Detectives working diligently to collect evidence and develop suspects, until December 1, 2012 when the bodies of Luis Morales and Benjamin Mariano were found in the early morning hours near the corner of West 23rd and Canal. Both had been shot, multiple times at about 2:30 a.m. but were not discovered until two hours later. Investigators determined that both had gotten into an argument with Pete Valenzuela over gang issues, at a party in an apartment nearby. He followed them down the street and shot both to death. Before that case could be completely investigated, Defendant Pete Valenzuela, along with Patrick Cervantes and Israel Barajas attacked a Merced man who had returned from town after completing Navy boot camp and was visiting the girlfriend of Patrick Cervantes. This occurred in the early morning hours of December 23, 2012. During the attack, all three severely beat the man and as he ran for his life, fired two rounds from the same semi-automatic pistol that had been used to kill Jacobo, Morales and Mariano.

Merced Police Department detectives, led by Joe Deliman worked tirelessly to build the case, bringing it to the District Attorney's office for filing. The prosecutors trying the case were Chief Deputy District Attorney Harold Nutt and Deputy District Attorney Tyson McCoy. "On behalf of the District Attorney's Office and the People of the State of California, we would like to thank the jurors who agreed to sit on this lengthy and complicated trial" stated Harold Nutt. "Because of their hard work and diligence, we were finally able to see that justice was done. Hopefully, this will help to bring closure to the families of those who were killed.