



## VISALIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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\*\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\*\*

January 13, 2022

### VISALIA TRIPLE HOMICIDE UPDATE & OPERATION TRAILBLAZER

#### PRESS RELEASE

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020, at 11:15 p.m. officers were dispatched to the parking lot of Golden West High School in response to a report of shots fired. Once officers arrived, they located a solo vehicle in the parking lot. Upon approaching the vehicle, officers located two deceased males in the vehicle and one deceased male in the parking lot, all suffering from gunshot wounds. The victims in this case were identified as Jose Hernandez-Pena (19), Isaiah Rule (18), and Blake Medeiros (19).

Visalia Police Department Violent Crimes Detectives, Special Enforcement Unit Officers, and Crime Scene Investigators were called out to assist in the investigation.

Violent Crimes Detectives with the Visalia Police Department have worked the case tirelessly since that night. Detectives have contacted and interviewed numerous individuals, evaluated multiple items of evidence, and authored numerous search warrants to ascertain what occurred that night, and identify those responsible. Detectives have also met with the victim's family members on a regular basis to keep them updated on the progress of this case.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Visalia Police Department partnered with Central Valley Crime Stoppers and the friends and family of Isaiah Rule, Blake Medeiros, and Jose Hernandez-Peña to offer a \$9,000 reward for information leading to an arrest of the suspect or suspects responsible for the homicides.

In July of 2021, the California Department of Justice and the California Highway Patrol Special Operations Unit were asked to join the investigation and assist investigators from the Visalia Police Department, Tulare County Sheriff's Office, and the Tulare County District Attorney's Office in what would become Operation Trailblazer. Operation Trailblazer focused on the enhanced surveillance and investigation of individuals believed to be directly involved with the triple homicide and who were members of the Sureño criminal street gang in the cities of Visalia and Ivanhoe.

Detectives continued to work leads and analyze data collected during the investigation. They've authored ninety (90) search warrants, conducted sixty (60) interviews, searched over two hundred twenty (220) digital accounts, and followed up on numerous anonymous tips.

Based on all information revealed during the investigation, detectives have identified suspects Mark Aceves (20), Cesar Lopez (19), and Abraham Molina (20) as being involved in the triple homicide that occurred in the City of Visalia on May 5, 2020. All three of the suspects are Sureño street gang members or associates.



Additionally, detectives identified several other Sureño gang members and associates that were involved in the subsequent effort to destroy evidence following the homicide.

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, Visalia Police Department Detectives applied for a \$50,000 reward through the State of California Governor's Office to assist in bringing the suspects responsible for this crime to justice. In December of 2021, the Governor approved the reward.

While the primary focus of this operation was to bring the suspects responsible for the homicides to justice, the investigation also identified a criminal enterprise operating across state lines and into the country of Mexico. Detectives learned that local Sureño gang members and associates were importing guns from Texas and were paying for the weapons with methamphetamine and cocaine obtained from drug trafficking organizations in Mexico. The weapons and narcotics were being shipped through the U.S. Postal Service. Once investigators learned of this criminal enterprise, they notified U.S. Postal Inspectors and coordinated with local Texas Law Enforcement Agencies, the F.B.I., and the U.S. Attorney's Office to seize several postal packages. Those seizures resulted in eighteen (18) firearms and twenty (20) pounds of cocaine being intercepted by law enforcement.

After four (4) months of collaborative investigation with our law enforcement partners, the Visalia Police Department and assisting agencies prevented at least four (4) violent crimes from occurring and seized a total of thirty-one (31) firearms from Sureño gang members and associates.

Over the course of the investigation, the Visalia Police Department was assisted by the Tulare County Sheriff's Office, Tulare County District Attorney's Office, US Attorney's Office Eastern District of California, Federal Bureau of Investigation, California Department of Justice Bureau of Investigations & Firearms, and the California Highway Patrol Special Operations Unit. The assistance of these various agencies was imperative in helping the Visalia Police Department to bolster the cases against the identified suspects and their associates.

On January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Officers and Tactical Units from Visalia Police Department, California Highway Patrol, Kings County Sheriff's Office, Porterville Police Department, Kings County Major Crimes Task Force, Fresno County District Attorney's Office, Tulare County Sheriff's Office, Department of Justice, California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation (CDCR), CDCR Pleasant Valley, Bakersfield Police Department, Merced County Sheriff's Office, Kern County Sheriff's Office, Fresno County Sheriff's Office, Tulare Police Department, CDCR North Kern, CDCR Corcoran, MAGEC Task Force, Sacramento FBI, Bakersfield FBI, and San Francisco FBI, served twenty-seven (27) state search warrants, eighteen (18) state arrest warrants, five (5) federal search warrants, and four (4) federal arrest warrants. Additionally, arrests will also be made by law enforcement agencies in Oregon and Texas in connection with this investigation.

"I am grateful that this investigation has led to the arrests of suspects involved in the May 2020 triple homicide of Jose Hernandez-Peña, Isaiah Rule, and Blake Medeiros and that this will begin to bring healing and justice to their families." Visalia Police Chief Jason Salazar said. "I am also very proud of the hard work and dedication of the Visalia Police Detectives who have worked so diligently on this case and to all of our law enforcement partners on this investigation for their contributions and resources to help bring justice to these families and to our community."



While the triple homicide investigation has culminated in the arrests of the three primary suspects, the Visalia Police Department would like to remind the public that the Governor's Reward of \$50,000 is still available to material witnesses that can provide investigators and prosecutors with direct knowledge of the triple homicide. Those individuals with information are asked to contact the Visalia Police Department's Violent Crimes Unit at (559) 713-4234.

