



County of Santa Cruz

Sheriff-Coroner

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Sheriff-Coroner

Sheriff's Media Release

Media representatives are invited to attend a press conference on Thursday, July 3, 2014 at 10 a.m. at the Sheriff's Headquarters located at 5200 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz concerning an arrest on a major case. Sheriff-elect Jim Hart is conducting a press conference to announce an arrest in a violent, stranger-rape that occurred in Aptos during 2004 and was recently solved due to a DNA hit.

During the early morning hours on July 31, 2004 a 19 year old local woman was walking on McGregor Drive near New Brighton Road in Aptos when, without warning, she was knocked down the embankment by a stranger who violently sexually assaulted and strangled her (case 04-06948). When the suspect finally left, the victim crawled up the embankment and ran onto the road seeking help from anyone she could find; a passerby found her and called the Sheriff's Office. During the investigation, a sexual assault examination was performed to collect evidence. The suspect was not identified but biological evidence collected during the sexual assault exam resulted in an identifiable DNA profile, which was loaded into an unsolved crime database maintained by the California Department of Justice. That database is designed to check DNA from unsolved crimes against samples from known offenders. Nonetheless, ten years passed without a match.

On June 18, 2014 Criminalists at the California Department of Justice notified the Sheriff's Office there was a DNA hit linking Salvador Ceja-Rocha, age 46, to the case. Sheriff's detectives had arrested Rocha on May 5, 2014 for an unrelated sexual assault case that occurred on April 20, 2014 (case 14-03155). In that case, Rocha, working as a taxi cab driver, picked up an intoxicated woman in Capitola and drove her to a remote section of Aptos Creek Road where he attempted to rape her. The woman escaped and ran to nearby neighbors to ask for help. Following investigation, Detectives identified and arrested Rocha. Based on that arrest, Correctional Officers at the County Jail collected a DNA sample from Rocha as part of a routine collection program for qualifying offenders. It was that sample that, once submitted to the unsolved crime database, led to the hit on Rocha for the 2004 unsolved rape case. Rocha has been in custody since his arrest on May 5, 2014. An updated DNA sample obtained from Rocha by Detectives confirmed the hit and Rocha has been arrested for the 2004 rape.

Detectives are now searching local records for similar unsolved crimes and have alerted regional law enforcement agencies of the facts to determine if there may be additional crimes Rocha is responsible for in the region.

The survivors in these cases have been notified of the arrest and have expressed relief that he will no longer be able to harm others. The Sheriff's Office hopes this arrest, in some small way, will provide a sense of closure for the survivors.

This case demonstrates close coordination between Detectives, Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners, Criminalists, Correctional Officers and Prosecutors.

Press Release Prepared by: Craig Wilson, Lieutenant

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