



NEWS RELEASE

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Three suspects in March gang assault sentenced to prison

Written by Elizabeth Larson, Lake County News

Tuesday, 28 August 2007

LAKEPORT – Three Sureno gang members accused of participating in a March assault in Library Park have received prison sentences.

The District Attorney's Office reported that on Monday Judge Arthur Mann sentenced Juan Luis Yopez, 17, to eight years in prison and gave Mathew Allen Domeier, 17, and Elias Hernandez, 20, each nine-year prison terms for their part in the March 16 assault of Alex Larranaga of Clearlake Oaks.

Larranaga, 19 at the time of the assault, was approached by several known gang members as he was leaving TNT's Restaurant with his family, as Lake County News previously reported. The gang members began flashing gang signs before they jumped Larranaga, who was beaten and stabbed.

Domeier and Yopez, ages 16 and 17, respectively, at the time of the assault, were tried as adults in the case after they were found unfit to be tried as juveniles in an April 30 hearing, according to Chief Deputy District Attorney Richard Hinchcliff. In July, Domeier, Yopez and Hernandez all pleaded guilty to felony assault likely to cause great bodily injury, Hinchcliff reported.

The three documented Sureno gang members also admitted to a special allegation that the offense was committed for the benefit of a criminal street gang with the specific intent to promote criminal conduct by gang members, Hinchcliff said.

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Prosecuting the case was Gary Luck, who retired last year as the District Attorney but has joined the office of his successor, Jon Hopkins, as a deputy district attorney specializing in juvenile cases.

Attorney Stephen Carter, who represented Domeier, said his client and the other defendants at first faced a much stiffer sentence – life in prison – because they had been charged with attempted murder, aggravated mayhem (a charge related to attempted murder, according to Hinchcliff) and a more serious gang enhancement.

Carter said he and the other defense attorneys on the case, including Roy Miller of Santa Rosa, worked to lower the charges, arriving at a plea deal on charges that Carter said he felt the District Attorney's Office could prove in court. "So even though Mathew got a significant prison sentence, I was very pleased to avoid him getting a life sentence," Carter said.

Domeier did not hold the knife, said Carter, but was engaged in hitting and kicking Larranaga. Lt. Brad Rasmussen of Lakeport Police said that another suspect in the case who has not yet gone to trial, Ricardo Muniz, 18, is accused of actually stabbing Larranaga. Another juvenile defendant, 14 at the time, was charged in the case but there was no information on his case status Tuesday.

Domeier, who had been in the gang about a year when the assault occurred, had a sad family life – he never knew his father – and was interested in going into the military at one point, Carter said.

"He could have gone a much better way," said Carter.

In the case of a juvenile like Domeier, Carter said he'll actually serve only four and a half years of the nine-year sentence. At least half of that prison time will be spent in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Juvenile Justice Division, former known as the California Youth Authority, Carter added.

Hinchcliff said all three young men will be required to register with law

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enforcement as gang members once they're released from prison. In addition, they'll be required to pay restitution to Larranaga. However, the amount they'll be required to pay has yet to be determined; Hinchcliff said it will depend on Larranaga's extensive medical bills and any other out-of-pocket expenses that he and his family incurred because of the assault.

Convicted gang members were significant players

All of the gang members involved in the Larranaga assault are members of a local Surenos gang known as the South Side Willow Pointers, Hinchcliff said. Investigators identified them by gang monikers including "Crazy" and "Rascal."

Lakeport Police Det. Norm Taylor said Domeier, Yopez, Hernandez and the other defendants were part of a core group that resided or spent a majority of their time in the Willopoint Resort and Library Park areas. Since their arrests, there has been little or no gang presence in those areas, said Taylor.

"They account for a substantial portion of the active gang members in the community," Taylor added. "Their sentences will certainly have an impact on the gang activity we see in Lakeport, although it's just a continuing trend." As the community grows, Taylor said gang activity also will grow, with more young people being pulled into the gang lifestyle.

Taylor said the sentences handed out to the three suspects were "substantial."

"The judicial system and the District Attorney were very vigilant in going after and prosecuting the people responsible," said Taylor. "Law enforcement's attitude is they'll do everything they can to locate and prosecute anyone in criminal street gangs."

Assault victim still struggling to recover

For Larranaga, the victim of the March assault, the road to full recovery stills

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stretches ahead of him. Hinchcliff's report on the sentencing stated that Larranaga suffered numerous stab wounds that resulted in permanent injuries.

Taylor said he has spoken to Larranaga within the last few weeks. "He is very slowly recovering and very little progress has been made in his recovery." Police believe Larranaga was attacked by the Surenos-affiliated South Side Willow Pointers because they took him for the member of a rival gang, which Lt. Brad Rasmussen of Lakeport Police told Lake County News in a previous interview.

Taylor said Larranaga is undergoing extensive physical therapy to recover, but that he's at a "stalemate." "They are uncertain whether or not his paralysis that was caused by the attack is going to go away or if the nerve that was damaged is going to be able to heal," Taylor said. Taylor said he couldn't elaborate much more on Larranaga's condition due to privacy requirements.

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