



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

PRESS RELEASE

10/25/19

CONVICTED LINDSAY MURDERER SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON

Today in Department 10 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Judge Kathryn Montejano sentenced convicted murderer Joshua Stepp, age 30, to life in prison for the 2012 murder of 19-year-old Michael Avalos at a house in Lindsay.

On June 18, 2019, a jury convicted Joshua Stepp, age 30, of second-degree murder with the special allegation of using a deadly weapon (knife). A 2017 jury previously convicted Stepp of arson, but was unable to reach a unanimous decision on the charge of murder. Stepp possesses a 2008 strike for attempted carjacking with a knife.

In the early morning hours of September 14, 2012, Stepp was at his friend's house in Lindsay when the victim, Avalos, visited the house. Stepp believed Avalos had incriminating information against his friend, Strathmore gang member Eric Jimenez. Stepp proceeded to stab Avalos repeatedly. Stepp's friend, Nathan Hunt, age 28, assisted Stepp in putting Avalos' body into Stepp's car. Stepp then drove to an orchard outside Lindsay and set the car and the body on fire. Hunt was arrested later that day while Stepp fled to Missouri. Law enforcement arrested Stepp on September 17, 2012, and extradited him back to Tulare County.

Hunt pleaded to voluntary manslaughter and other crimes in 2014 and is facing over 30 years. In April of 2018, Eric Jimenez was convicted of second-degree murder in Avalos' killing and is currently on death row for robbing, killing, and burning another man in 2012.

Under current California law, Stepp will be eligible for parole after serving 46 years.

The case was prosecuted by former Supervising Deputy District Attorney Melissa Chabra and was investigated by Sergeant Steve Sanchez of the Tulare County Sheriff's Department and Criminal Investigator Jerry Hunzinger of the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations.

*Media inquiries can be directed to the Office of the District Attorney, County of Tulare
Assistant District Attorney Robert Dempsie (559) 636-5494*