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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Re: Darren Merenda #1408049

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Darren Jack Merenda, age 32, of Turlock, was convicted of 1st degree murder with premeditation and deliberation after a two-week jury trial that began on September 26, 2011. Deputy District Attorney Annette Rees prosecuted the case for the People.

The victim, Donald Deane Futch, was dating a woman who had previously been involved with Merenda. Darren Merenda moved into the Colorado Ave. apartments in Turlock in February of 2009. He and his neighbor, Brooke Barker, soon became friends and were romantically involved from May to June of 2009. Barker broke off her relationship with Merenda and began dating Futch in July 2009. Merenda continued to pursue Barker, buying her things, leaving cigarettes or a drink on her doorstep, or asking her to purchase food for him from her work. "He basically would look for a reason to contact her, to get a response, anything to keep that connection," Rees argued during closing arguments on Thursday October 6, 2011.

On September 12, 2009 Barker, Futch and others went out to Staley's bar in Turlock. Merenda was also there and saw them, but according to Barker's testimony in the trial, Barker did not see Merenda. Merenda texted Barker at 2:31 am and she did not respond. He texted her again at 3:29 am. Barker handed her cell phone to Futch who read Merenda's text and responded: "This is Donny. Shut the f— up dumb ass." Eight minutes later Merenda texted back: "Donnie... I'm not so dumb." Following that exchange, Futch called Merenda and told him to meet them outside to talk. Unbeknownst to Futch who was unarmed, Merenda had hidden under his shirt a 10-inch, double blade dagger. When Futch turned to walk toward the alley, Merenda pulled his dagger. Barker yelled "hey," causing Futch to turn around. Futch was stabbed a total of 11 times and died there at the scene. Dr. Baik, the forensic medical examiner who testified, explained that one of the fatal wounds was 13 inches deep into Futch's chest.

"This was cold blooded murder," argued Rees. "For eight minutes he thought about the fact that Donny was with her, they were together in her apartment, and Donny was getting in the way of his connection to Brooke." "Merenda chose a specific weapon, he hid it under his shirt, he waited for Donny to look away – and then he brutally murdered him." Rees told the jury.

Sentencing and victim impact statements are set for November 29, 2011 in Department 1. Merenda faces a 25 years-to-life prison sentence.