



# Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

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## PRESS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release

Date: January 13, 2025  
Re: Darren Lawrence Lee  
Convicted Double Murderer Granted Parole

### For More Information Contact:

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Modesto, California – In one of the most notorious and heinous murders in Stanislaus County’s history, the California State Board of Parole granted Darren Lawrence Lee parole. Lee was convicted for his participation in the brutal killing of husband and wife Phillip and Kathryn Ranzo, a well-respected couple in the community.

District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Darren Lawrence Lee, age 61, of Modesto was found suitable for parole during a January 9, 2025, hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings held at San Quentin State Prison.

“The depravity and senselessness of this crime shocked our community in 1979, and once again the Ranzo family and our community find themselves retraumatized and shocked by the decision to release Lee,” said District Attorney Jeff Laugero.

On June 25, 1979, Lee and his three crime partners Marty Jackson (aka Marty Spears), Ronald Anderson, and Jeffrey Maria planned a home invasion robbery of the home of Phillip and Kathryn Ranzo because they believed a large amount of cash was kept inside the home. Mr. Ranzo was a respected pharmacist working for the city hospital and Mrs. Ranzo owned and operated a hair salon.

In preparation for the robbery, Lee and the others drove by the Ranzo home as many as five times. When Lee, Maria and Spears finally stopped the car near the Ranzo home, they were all armed with firearms and carried rope to tie up the Ranzos. Before leaving Anderson at the car to act as a lookout, Lee and his cohorts spoke of an intent to kill the Ranzos.

Spears and Lee knocked on the door, lying to Mr. Ranzo, telling him that they had run out of gas and wanted to use the phone. Maria was hiding in the bushes. Mr. Ranzo explained that the phone was not working and before the group left offered them some gas he had in the garage. As Mr. Ranzo led the group into the garage, Spears and Lee pulled out their guns and threatened to kill Mr. Ranzo. Spears and Lee forced Mr. Ranzo to the floor and hogtied his legs and feet together. Mr. Ranzo suffered torture wounds to his eyelids and was struck repeatedly in the head with his son’s baseball bat.

After attacking Mr. Ranzo, Lee and Spears went into the Ranzo home and Mrs. Ranzo was forced at gunpoint into her bedroom upstairs where she was tied up and assaulted. Lee ransacked the Ranzo home. Without seeking aid for the Ranzos, Lee and Maria fled to safety, carrying away money and jewelry.

On June 26, 1979, the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Ranzo were found in their home. Both had been hogtied. Phillip Ranzo was found dead on the floor of the garage. He had been beaten over the head with a baseball bat at least six times and suffered a fatal stab wound to the neck. Kathryn Ranzo was found in an upstairs bathroom of the home. She had been struck multiple times in the head with an axe. She had been sexually assaulted and suffered a fatal stab wound to the throat. Both victims had been tortured and suffered multiple cuts to their eyelids and face. The house had been ransacked, with cash, jewelry and a gun missing. The murders orphaned the Ranzos' 10-year-old child, Mark, who spent that night at his grandparents' house.

Pre-trial publicity caused the trial to be moved to Sacramento County on a change of venue. In 1980, a Sacramento County Superior Court jury convicted Lee of the murders, and he was sentenced to two concurrent sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. On appeal, Lee's sentence was modified, and he was sentenced to two concurrent terms of 25 years to life.

At the parole hearing, Prosecutor Amy Neumann urged the Board not to release Lee. She argued that he needed additional insight into the role he played in the killings, more victim impact programming, and more sustained drug rehabilitation programming.

Surviving members of the victims' family also attended the hearing and asked the Board to deny Lee's parole. The family has attended 33 parole board hearings and other post-conviction hearings for Lee and his crime partners.

After deliberations, the Board determined that Lee qualified for elderly parole and youthful offender considerations, and that he did not pose a risk to public safety. This was Lee's 9th parole hearing.

The Board's decision to grant parole advances to the Decision Review Unit of the Board of Parole Hearings, which has 120 days to review the grant of parole. If the Decision Review Unit approves the grant of parole, Governor Newsom will receive notice of the parole grant and has 30 days to reverse, modify, refer to the full Board, sitting *en banc*, or let the grant of parole stand.

Members of the community who wish to comment on Lee's potential parole release are encouraged to contact:

- Governor Gavin Newsom  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 445-2841  
<https://www.gov.ca.gov/contact/>  
(Scroll down to the comment subject "Parole – Governors Review" and include Darren Lawrence Lee, CDCR #C16213.)
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation  
Board of Parole Hearings  
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