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THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Press Releases

CHARGES BROUGHT IN 1991 COLD CASE MURDERS FOR STABBINGS AT SMITH'S RESTAURANT IN PRUNEDAILE

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Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni announced today that Ira Ulyesses Bastian, age 85 and a current resident of Fresno, has been charged with the cold-case murders of 67-year-old George Smith and his 79-year-old mother-in-law, Eva Thompson.

In 1991, Mr. Smith and his wife Anna owned and lived at Smith's Restaurant, which was located on El Camino Real in Prunedale. Victim Mrs. Thompson was Anna Smith's mother who lived with the couple.

On November 11, 1991, Anna Smith returned home from running errands and discovered that her husband and mother had been brutally stabbed to death. Mrs. Thompson, who was unable to walk, was found slain in her hospital-style bed.

Bastian, then age 52, was a former employee of Smith's Restaurant. He was considered a suspect in the initial investigation, though no arrests were made at the time. The Monterey County Sheriff's Office diligently pursued the case for decades and continued to submit and re-submit items of evidence in the case for newer and more sophisticated DNA testing. In 2024, an additional round of DNA testing yielded sufficient evidence to support the arrest and filing of criminal charges. Bastian was arrested without incident on July 15.

Bastian is charged with two counts of first-degree murder, with special circumstance allegations that he murdered the victims during the commission of a burglary and that he committed multiple murders. It is also alleged that he personally used a knife in the commission of the killings. If one or more of the special circumstances is found true by a jury, Bastian could potentially face the death penalty or life in prison without the possibility of parole. He is expected to be arraigned on the charges on July 16.

In July 2020, District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni created the Monterey County District Attorney's Office Cold Case Task Force, which represents the largest and most comprehensive county-wide effort to investigate, solve and prosecute cold-case homicides in Monterey County. Since the creation of the Cold Case Task Force, four defendants have been convicted of cold-case murders at jury trial, three additional defendants are awaiting trial for murder, and one suspect is pending trial for a cold-case

sexual assault. Three other homicides were closed due to the death or mental incompetency of the identified suspect. Four previously unidentified decedents have also been identified through DNA testing.

In January 2022, the Monterey County District Attorney's Office Cold Case Task Force received a \$535,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance. The grant, titled "FY 2021 Prosecuting Cold Cases Using DNA," provides funding to support forensic testing and investigative activities in the prosecution of cold cases where DNA from a suspect has been identified. Funding from the U.S. Department of Justice grant enabled the Cold Case Task Force to seek justice in this case.

Anyone who has information about Ira Bastian or the murders of George Smith and Eva Thompson is encouraged to contact District Attorney Investigator Oliver Minnig.

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