

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

SALINAS MAN WHO FLED 2013 JURY TRIAL APPREHENDED, SENTENCED FOR SECOND DUI OFFENSE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that Martin Vargas-Castillo, age 32 of Salinas, was sentenced today to 544 days in county jail for driving under the influence of alcohol with a prior conviction and driving on a suspended license on August 25, 2013. Vargas-Castillo had been in the middle of a jury trial on the charges in December 2013 when he failed to appear in court, and a bench warrant was issued for his arrest. He was convicted by the jury in absentia but remained a fugitive for more than two and a half years, until he was arrested by Salinas Police Department this June.

On August 25, 2013, Vargas-Castillo was following a friend's vehicle home from a bar. Both drivers were under the influence of alcohol. A California Highway Patrol officer observed both vehicles weaving in their lanes and observed them nearly collide with each other. The officer pulled over Vargas-Castillo's friend, who was also arrested for driving under the influence. Vargas-Castillo parked his vehicle at his house and walked back to the scene of his friend's traffic stop, where the officer recognized him as the other driver. He had a blood alcohol level of .12/.13 percent at the time of his arrest.

At trial, he contended that he had not been the driver of the second vehicle. After the prosecution's witnesses testified, Vargas-Castillo called one defense witness, a friend who had been with him at the bar earlier that night. When court ended for the day on December 3, 2013, the judge ordered Vargas-Castillo to return the following day for continuation of his trial. Vargas-Castillo never appeared.

The jury ultimately convicted him in absentia, with the judge finding that he had deliberately failed to appear in order to avoid the process of the court. A warrant for his arrest was issued in December 2013, but he remained at large until he was contacted by police on an unrelated matter on June 25, 2016.

At sentencing, Monterey Superior Court Albert H. Maldonado found Vargas-Castillo an inappropriate candidate for probation, citing his failure to successfully complete his prior grant of probation and his lengthy absence from the court proceedings as justification for the jail term.