

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

SERIAL BURGLAR FOUND GUILTY FOR 2016 CRIME SPREE IN SALINAS AND TORO PARK

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that Salinas resident Ramon Bernal, age 35, was found guilty after a week-long jury trial of offenses arising from a 2016 crime spree in Salinas and Toro Park.

Bernal's crime spree began on March 3, 2016, when he committed a first-degree residential burglary in the Creekbridge neighborhood in Salinas. The homeowners and their three young children came home from work and school to find their house had been ransacked. Surveillance video showed Bernal spent 45 minutes inside of the home, and left with suitcases full of the family's possessions. The video also showed Bernal spent over five minutes inside the young girls' bedrooms, and stole items including their piggy banks.

On June 11, 2016, an observant neighbor in Toro Park saw Bernal and an accomplice breaking into cars in Toro Park. The neighbor and victim called 911, and stayed on the phone with dispatch while they followed Bernal throughout the Toro Park neighborhood for approximately 20 minutes. When deputies stopped Bernal as he attempted to flee on Highway 68 eastbound, they discovered his car was full of stolen property. Among other items, they found a hat that belonged to a ten-year old Toro Park baseball player, a law enforcement badge reportedly taken in a vehicle burglary earlier in the year, multiple pieces of mail, UPS/Amazon packages, a checkbook, and a Social Security employee badge stolen in a vehicle burglary several months prior.

On August 19, 2016, Bernal was captured on video at the Lucky store on South Main Street using a credit card that was stolen in a vehicle burglary at Zeph's three days prior. The video showed Bernal was accompanied by his six-year-old child as he committed this felony identity theft.

On October 21, 2016, Bernal was in the midst of breaking into a vehicle parked at the Salinas Nob Hill around 11:30am when the vehicle owner came out of the store and found him in the car rifling through a diaper bag. The victim, who was with his fiancé and one month old child, confronted Bernal and pulled him out of his car. Bernal then pulled a knife on the victim, threatened him, and then sped away. While leaving the parking lot, Bernal nearly broadsided an off-duty CHP, who had to brake to avoid a major collision. The victims, CHP officer, and witnesses all identified Bernal's vehicle despite his attempts to conceal it by removing the paper license plates.

Bernal was arrested for the October 21 Nob Hill incident on October 30, 2016. A search incident to arrest revealed a work ID and personal check of an East Salinas resident in Bernal's pockets.

Officers contacted that victim, who had not realized the items were missing. She told officers she and her husband and eight-year-old child had been on their way to the cemetery to visit her father in law's grave, and stopped at the North Salinas Costco at about 4:30 pm to buy flowers. Their car was burglarized – in broad daylight in a busy parking lot - in the brief time they were inside the store.

On December 1, 2016, Bernal broke into two cars. First, he brought his young child and used her as a decoy while he broke into a locked vehicle at a downtown shop. That victim took photographs of Bernal and his vehicle, which helped the Salinas Police Department ultimately identify Bernal. Next, he parked in a busy parking lot at a downtown gym, and was seen on surveillance video breaking into the victim's locked SUV. In that case, he stole thousands of dollars' worth of jewelry - including the victim's wedding rings.

On December 21, 2016, Salinas police officers went to Bernal's house to search for the stolen rings and other stolen property. When they arrived, they found his six-year-old child and newborn baby living in deplorable conditions. The apartment was not lit, there was little to no furniture, nearly every possible surface was piled high with property suspected to be stolen, there was visible mold growing in the bathroom, the bathroom floor was full of wet clothing that smelled like mildew, and officers found two methamphetamine pipes in the apartment. CPS was notified and Bernal was arrested.

Bernal's eight open cases were consolidated for a jury trial which began on January 22, 2018. Jurors heard from well over twenty witnesses, and convicted Bernal on every charge after approximately five hours of deliberation.

Bernal will be sentenced on March 9, 2018, by the Honorable Andrew Liu, who presided over the trial. These convictions include Bernal's third and fourth "strike" offenses, meaning he faces 25 years to life in prison under California's "Three Strikes" law. His previous strike offenses were in 2007, when he was convicted of evading arrest with a gang enhancement, and in 2010, when he was convicted of a first-degree residential burglary that occurred in the city of Marina.

These cases were investigated by numerous officers with the Salinas Police Department, notably Detective Byron Gansen, Detective Ken Hendrickson, Officer John McNeil, and retired Officer Scott Gemette. The Toro Park case was investigated by Monterey County Sheriff's Deputies Daniel Mitchell, Joseph Martinez, and Tyler Pierce.

The Salinas Police Department recovered a large amount of property from Bernal's residence and is now actively seeking to reunite victims with their stolen items. If you were the victim of a residential or vehicle burglary in the Salinas or Toro Park area in 2016, and had items – particularly jewelry - stolen from you that have not been recovered, please contact Detective Byron Gansen at 831-758-7137 or byrong@ci.salinas.ca.us.

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