



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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Murder Suspect Found Legally Insane

A homeless Chico man was found legally insane by a Butte County judge today after that same judge found the defendant guilty of the first-degree murder of a homeless Chico woman in a court trial last week. The murder occurred on the Chico State University campus in 2018.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said as a result of that insanity finding, **Samuel Eugene Johnson**, 30, was therefore found not guilty by reason of insanity for the murder of Linda Blacksten, 55. Ramsey said Johnson will be committed to the state mental hospital.

Ramsey said Blacksten's battered body was discovered on October 30, 2018 shortly before 5:00 a.m. in a pool of blood in an alcove on the south side of Kendall Hall on the university campus. Witnesses noted Blacksten was homeless and occasionally slept on campus.

The Chico State University Police investigated the homicide and quickly developed information leading to Johnson's arrest. Ramsey said the night of the murder, at 1:18 a.m. a 911 caller reported a male yelling at a female and threatening to kick the female's teeth in. In a later interview, the caller told police he heard the verbal altercation take place at the alcove where Blacksten's body was later discovered. The caller also said he saw Johnson nearby the alcove.

An autopsy revealed Blacksten was killed by blunt force trauma and suffered multiple broken bones including fractures to her skull, vertebra, pelvis and fractures to most of her ribs. DNA testing revealed Blacksten's blood was on Johnson's pants and shoes.

No motive was discovered for the murder.

Ramsey said Johnson then pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. Ramsey explained that when a defendant pleads not guilty by reason of insanity, the defendant's trial is broken into two phases – the guilt phase and the sanity phase. Johnson waived a jury trial and submitted both phases to the judge to try.

On May 19, 2021, during the guilt phase of Johnson's court trial, Butte County Superior Court Judge Jesus Rodriguez found Johnson guilty of 1st degree murder.

Today, during the sanity phase of the court trial, the defense presented evidence of Johnson's extensive history of Schizophrenia. A court-appointed psychologist testified and opined Johnson was in a psychotic state when he killed Blacksten and that Johnson did not understand the difference between right and wrong at the time of the killing. After hearing the evidence, Judge Rodriguez found Johnson not guilty by reason of insanity and set the matter for a placement hearing on June 23, 2021.

Ramsey said due to the violent nature of the offense, Johnson, who has been in custody since the murder, will be placed in the state mental hospital for psychiatric treatment. Such a commitment carries the potential for a life sentence in the state hospital until doctors and a court determine he has regained his sanity and is safe to release.