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PRESS RELEASE

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JURY CONVICTS FORMER SOLEDAD RESIDENT OF FIRST-DEGREE MURDER FOR KILLING EX-GIRLFRIEND IN 2010

People v Noel Aguilera Ledesma, 25CR000764

SALINAS, California- Monterey County District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni announced that on February 10, 2026, a Monterey County jury found Noel Ledesma, age 44 and formerly a resident of Soledad and Yuma, Ariz., guilty of the 2010 first-degree murder of Yvette Martinez.

In early 2010, Martinez and Ledesma dated, but they subsequently broke up. Despite the breakup, they remained connected to each other. For months, Ledesma attempted to persuade Martinez to get back together with him. However, in mid-September, Martinez began dating another person.

On October 9, 2010, Martinez went out with friends and her then-boyfriend. She went out drinking in Salinas and then went to a corn maze with her boyfriend. She saw a different friend at a Salinas restaurant before heading home. Throughout the night, Ledesma was calling and texting Martinez's cell phone, but she largely ignored his texts and calls. As the night progressed, Ledesma became angrier that Martinez was not responding to him. He told her that his friends were ridiculing him and laughing at him.

A little after midnight on October 10, 2010, Ledesma went to Martinez's home in Greenfield and waited there for hours. At 3:11 a.m., Martinez arrived back at her home but did not make it inside. She was never seen alive again.

That morning, Martinez's phone was disconnected from her cellular network for the whole day, the only time in the prior six months her phone was ever meaningfully disconnected from the network. For a brief period of time in the afternoon, Martinez's phone reconnected to her network, and her phone sent a few messages to friends that they suspected were not actually from Martinez. Martinez's friends and family tried calling her phone all day, but her phone would never answer, despite the fact she was someone who was extremely responsive to cell phone contact.

At 8:00 p.m., Martinez's vehicle was found burning on the side of Highway 198, a few miles from Priest Valley Road, an extremely rural patch of highway. Martinez's body was found in the trunk of her own car. Someone had attempted to push her vehicle down a canyon, but the vehicle got stuck on a berm. A later autopsy determined that Martinez had died of strangulation. Her body was so badly burned that she had to be identified by her dental records.

In 2010, Monterey County Sheriff's Office detectives suspected Ledesma was the killer due to suspicious behavior he exhibited in the days following her death, his history of domestic violence against other partners, and the content of his text messages with Martinez that night. However, Ledesma claimed he was home the day she disappeared and was at a family party when the car fire was set. Ledesma's brother vouched for his alibi. At the time, investigators were unable to disprove the alibi.

In July 2020, District Attorney Jeannine M. Pacioni created the 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. The Cold Case Task Force has been actively collaborating with the Sheriff's Office to work on multiple unsolved homicide cases, including Martinez's case.

In January 2022, the 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.

In 2024, using grant funding, the Task Force hired Jason Riechers of Hawks Consulting to re-examine the cell phone data. Mr. Riechers was able to process the 2010 cellular data and provide extremely powerful visual evidence that demonstrated Ledesma's alibi was false. Mr. Riechers's analysis showed that Ledesma was at or near Martinez's home in Greenfield for hours before she arrived home. It showed Ledesma's phone was in the same part of Salinas as Martinez's cell phone when her phone was briefly turned on to send messages to friends pretending to be her. The data also showed that Ledesma was not at the family party at the time Martinez's vehicle was found burning.

Judge Jennifer O'Keefe will preside over the sentencing on March 12, 2026. Ledesma will receive a mandatory sentence of 25 years to life in prison. The original homicide investigation was conducted by multiple detectives from the Monterey County Sheriff's Office, with CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Richard Lopez overseeing the arson investigation. The lead investigators since 2024 were District Attorney Investigators Oliver Minnig, Justin Bell, and Bill Clark.

Since the creation of the Cold Case Task Force, seven defendants have been convicted of cold-case murders at jury trial, and three defendants have pleaded guilty to cold-case murders. Three other homicides were closed due to the death or mental incompetency of the identified suspect. Ten previously unidentified decedents have also been identified through DNA testing.