

**CRIME**

# Prunedale man pleads guilty to child molestation

**By Tommy Wright**  
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**SALINAS »** Crispin Manuel Vasquez of Prunedale pleaded guilty Wednesday to one count of forcible child molestation, a charge that counts as a strike under the state's three-strikes law.

The victim reported that Vasquez, a family friend, sexually molested her six to eight years ago when she was 10-12 years old, the Monterey County District Attorney's Office said.

Vasquez, 56, has four prior indecent exposure convictions.

Judge Mark Hood is expected to sentence Vasquez to eight years in state prison on May 22. He will be required to serve 85 percent of his sentence because it is a violent felony and Vasquez will be required to register as a sexual offender.

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**CRIME**

# Salinas man sentenced to 18 years for domestic violence

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**SALINAS »** Judge Julie Culver sentenced Michael Russ of Salinas to 18 years for a violent and prolonged attack on his wife last year, the Monterey County District Attorney's Office said Wednesday.

Russ and his wife were parked near Sherwood Park in Salinas on July 9, 2017, when he accused her of cheating on him while he was incarcerated for a previous attack on her. Russ, 41, became enraged when she denied cheating on him, the DA's Office said. When he tried to remove her from the vehicle, Russ' wife refused to go. The DA's Office said she considered the car her home.

Russ proceeded to punch her in the head, used the child safety locks to prevent her from escap-

ing and drove to a dimly lit dead-end street in Salinas, where he began an assault that lasted for 12 hours. The DA's Office said he beat her repeatedly with his fists, a metal butane can and a wooden cane. At various points he held her down and sheared off pieces of her hair with an 8-inch knife and strangled her until she couldn't breathe.

A good Samaritan found Jane Doe lying on the sidewalk on his way to work the next morning and called 911. She was barely clothed and had been beaten to the point she was unable to stand. Her face was covered in blood from a cut above her left eye, while both eyes were bruised and swollen shut. She had bald patches on her head from the knife attack and would be later diagnosed with a facial fracture and cervical spine injuries from the attack.

Salinas police officers located Russ two days later and his wife's blood was found from the steering wheel to the rear compartment inside the car. According to the DA's Office, Russ told officers he thought he was going to jail for murder.

Russ was on parole for assaulting his wife with a firearm in 2012 in Santa Maria at the time of the attack last year. He had been arrested in Salinas three prior times in 2017 for misdemeanor attacks on his wife. Culver said at sentencing there was no question Russ beat his wife "within moments of her life."

If you or a loved one are experiencing domestic violence, call the YWCA at 831-372-6300 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE.

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**SALINAS VALLEY STATE PRISON**

## Officials investigate inmate death as homicide

**By Tommy Wright**  
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**SOLEDAD »** Officials from Salinas Valley State Prison are investigating the death of inmate George Argueta, 26, as a homicide after he was found lying on the floor in his cell Tuesday around 11:05 a.m. while staff members were performing security checks.

According to prison officials, Argueta sustained multiple stab wounds to his upper chest. An alarm sounded and staff removed Argueta from his cell and administered life-saving measures. He succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead at 11:26 a.m.

A suspect, Jacob L. Castro, was removed from the cell without incident and one inmate-manufactured weapon was recovered at the scene. Castro, 38, is being held in the prison's Administrative Investigation Unit while prison officials and the Monterey County District Attorney's Office investigates the incident. The prison received Cas-

tro Sept. 27, 2013, from Alameda County to serve 25 years to life for first-degree murder. He was convicted of assault with a deadly weapon on an inmate in January 2015 and sentenced to an additional eight years.

The prison received Argueta from Santa Cruz County Aug. 22, 2012, to serve a 12-year sentence for one count of second-degree robbery with the use of a firearm.

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**CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT INITIATIVE**

# 'Building Healthy Communities' looking to expand efforts

**By Nicoletta Lanese**  
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**SALINAS »** After eight years working to promote racial equity in East Salinas, the Building Healthy Communities initiative is expanding its efforts across Monterey County.

"Even if we want the benefit in East Salinas, we can't only focus on East Salinas," said Jesús Valenzuela, the communications manager for BHC. "In order to pass the policies we want to, it's going to take work not just from the people affected, but also allies."

"Building Healthy Communities" was an initiative launched in 2010 by the California Endowment, a not-for-profit whose mission is to improve public health and wellbeing across the state, particularly in underserved communities. BHC is a branch of this organization that takes action at the level of individual neighborhoods.

The East Salinas BHC holds community meetings to learn what the most pressing issues are for residents. Housing, immigration reform, education and health have emerged as primary concerns. The organization cultivates a network "action teams" supported by community partners, to come up with solutions and encourage political advocacy in community members. For example, the Health for All team partners with the Labor Council and Communities Organized for Rational Power in Action (COPA), and the Educational Equity team partners with Hartnell College and the Urban Arts Collective.

BHC has now moved beyond the bounds of East Salinas to interface with like-minded organizations across the county. They have dubbed the expansion effort "towards a Racially Equitable Monterey County." The initiative will be announced at a reception on Friday from 5 to 7 p.m. at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas. The

organization's partners, school board and Board of Supervisors members and invited community members will be in attendance along with several elected officials. Salinas Mayor Joe Gunther and Council member Scott Davis are expected at the event.

The organization is already stretching its reach over to the Monterey Peninsula. For instance, they recently entered partnership with the county-wide group Whites for Racial Equity. BHC is also interfacing with Monterey County to keep race relevant in the minds of policymakers.

"We're hoping to shift the way both the county and the city push for policies," said Valenzuela. For example, the organization is promoting widespread use of the Racial Equity Impact Assessment. The assessment requires policy makers to take pause and ask "What are the potential, intended or unintended, consequences this could have on communities of color?" he explained.

East Salinas was selected as one of fourteen BHC sites across the state. The community was identified as having the lowest education levels, lowest economic levels, highest housing density, highest crime rate and most gang activity in all of Monterey County. BHC has been working with private organizations, public agencies and residents to change that.

"There's no way we as Building Healthy Communities can speak for the people, therefore we have to go to the people," said Valenzuela. "Talk with the people, and provide the tools for people to organize and advocate for themselves."

Though their county-wide expansion is just being highlighted, BHC has already had success at the county level according to Valenzuela. By partnering with the Labor Council and (COPA) over the past two years, the organization helped provide health care services to un-

documented immigrants in Monterey County. Their \$500,000 pilot project was succeeded by Esperanza Care.

Through another fruitful partnership that began in 2014, BHC folded the city of Salinas and Monterey County into a nationwide network bound in support of racial equity. Through the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), county and city staff completed a year-long training program to monitor their own policies and practices for racial inequity. Race Forward heads the GARE program with the Haas Institute for a Fair & Inclusive Society, and worked with BHC to bring their work to Salinas.

"And that work has been expanding - the city of Salinas has been doing a lot on their own to increase their implementation of racial equity frameworks," said Valenzuela. The GARE training has informed such projects as the Alisal Vibrancy Plan, in which the city and citizens are partnering to move toward a safe and economically-sustainable future.

BHC is continuing its work, too. It's working to bring racial equity to the top of peoples' minds, whether they're engaging in philanthropy, writing legislation or engaging with their community. In the coming months, it aims to expand its network of support across Monterey County according to Valenzuela.

"We're reaching out to a host of organizations across the Peninsula," said Valenzuela. "We realize the importance of 'allship.'"

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*Thank you!*



You're invited to educational events on Relapsing Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

**WHO**  
 Leslie Tarlow, GNP, MSN, RN  
 Keck School of Medicine of USC

**WHEN**  
 Saturday, February 24, 2018  
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**WHERE**  
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Venue offers handicap accessibility. Modern meal will be provided.

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