DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Larry D. Morse II

ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Joseph M. Tresidder

CHIEF DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
David Moranda

CHIEF DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Harold L. Nutt

658 W. 20TH STREET, MERCED, CA 95340
TELEPHONE (AREA CODE 209) 385-7381
FAX (209) 725-3669

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

A Merced County jury took less than 15 minutes to convict a Los Banos man of drug charges Monday. After a day and a half of testimony, Juan Ignacio Lopez, 57, was found guilty of Possession for Sale of Methamphetamine and guilty of an enhancement for a previous conviction of the same charges.

On May 14, 2007, Los Banos Police Officer Marcelino Cortez was on foot patrol in the alleyway of 8th Street when he noticed Lopez in a nearby yard attempting to hide a bag containing12 individual packages of methamphetamine. Upon contacting the defendant, the officer found more than $700 in cash on him. Lopez admitted to selling methamphetamine, but later denied making that admission.

Deputy District Attorney Kimberly Madayag, who prosecuted the case, said “The jury had to choose between believing Officer Cortez or the defendant. It appears the decision was easy for them. I am pleased that their fast and just verdict removed a drug dealer from the street.”

Lopez is facing 6 years and 8 months in prison. Sentencing is set for July 21 at 8:15 a.m. in Courtroom 7 in Merced. Visiting Judge Roger Wayne was presiding during the trial and will sentence the defendant.