

Investigators with the Henderson County Sheriff's Office Violent Crime Unit obtained a warrant for the arrest of a man suspected in the shooting death of another man that took place in the county in May of 2006. The warrant was issued for Heriberto Hernandez-Meza, a 33 year old Hispanic male. He has long been the suspect in the shooting death of Mateo Perez, also Hispanic; who was 36 years of age at the time of his death on May 10, 2006.

This Homicide happened on May 10, 2006 at 16 Aspenbrook Lane in the Mountain Home area of Henderson County. The victim in this case is Mateo Perez 36 yoa at time of death. The cause of death in this case was multiple gunshot wounds (4). The suspect was identified as Heriberto Hernandez Meza 33 years of age at this time. Both victim and suspect were close associates of one another. The murder was the result of an on going confrontation between the two of them. The suspect was identified through forensic examinations and witness statements. Both victim and suspect have criminal history in multiple counties in Western North Carolina.

Sheriff's Investigators and agents of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigations have long suspected Hernandez Meza based on witness testimony and information gleaned at the scene. The information was not conclusive enough at the time for agents and investigators to obtain a warrant. The case was further complicated by the fact that the suspect was nowhere to be found and sources indicated that he had gone back to Mexico.

The Sheriffs Office assisted in large part by the NCSBI worked the case as a cold case, refusing to give up and continued to develop more leads and forensic evidence. According to Sheriff Rick Davis, "We are confident in the identity of the suspect in this murder. A warrant for 1st degree murder has been issued for Heriberto Hernandez-Meza for the shooting death of Mr. Mateo Perez. The warrant has been entered into the NCIC system and we look forward to his arrest and if necessary, his eventual return to Henderson County to face the Court. ."

Sheriff Davis also noted that "It is highly probable that if the 287g program had been in existence prior to the time of this incident, the murder may well have been prevented. Both the victim and the suspect had been arrested on misdemeanor charges and because both were in the U.S. illegally, one or both of them would have been deported and no longer living in this county."

He also addressed the issue of cold cases. "We are fortunate in this county that we do not suffer from an inordinate amount of unsolved capital crimes. It should be understood however; that no case ever just goes away for lack of evidence as far as we are concerned. Information isn't always developed on our timeline, and certainly we wish to solve every such case immediately. Nevertheless, our investigators never stop and our efforts are always supported and enhanced by the support of our neighboring agencies; particularly the criminal agents of the North Carolina SBI."

Heriberto Hernandez-Meza

