



ERIK NASARENKO

VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

NEWS RELEASE



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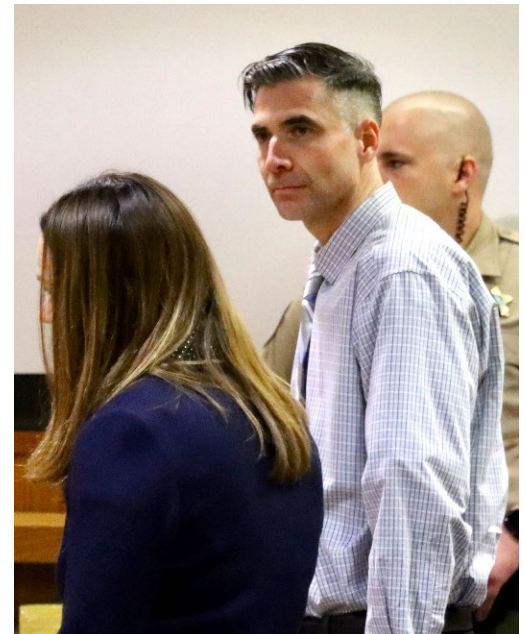
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Woodland Hills Man Convicted of Serial Assaults on Hikers & Sleeping Victims

VENTURA, Calif. – Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that Edgar Rodriguez Ruelas (DOB 03/24/82), of Woodland Hills, was convicted by a jury on May 2, 2024, of five felony counts related to assaults on women in their homes or on hiking trails, in Thousand Oaks, and Oak Park. Ruelas was found guilty of assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime on a person under 18, two additional counts of assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime on adults, assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime during a residential burglary, and forcible sexual penetration by a foreign object, with the special allegation that the crime was committed during a residential burglary where the defendant entered with the intent to commit a forcible sex crime.

Jurors returned on May 6, 2024, to decide on several aggravating factors. On May 7, 2024, the jury found three aggravating factors true, including an allegation that Ruelas represents a serious danger to society.



Senior Deputy District Attorney Brent Nibecker, who is assigned to handle cold case sexual assaults, prosecuted the case. Funding for Mr. Nibecker's position is provided through a Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

“Ruelas represents one of the more dangerous sexual offenders apprehended in Ventura County in recent history,” Mr. Nibecker said. “I am indebted to the brave victims in this case who not only resisted Ruelas when he attacked but had the courage to testify in court and ensure he can never target women again.”

Between June 2017, and March 2020, Ruelas attacked five female victims. The first charged offense occurred on June 15, 2017. Ruelas assaulted a 25-year-old female after entering her Thousand Oaks apartment through an unlocked door. The victim woke up in the early morning hours after hearing Ruelas open her bedroom door. Ruelas tried to force her onto her bed, but the victim fought back. She was able to yell for her roommate and after a brief struggle, Ruelas fled.

On July 14, 2017, Ruelas assaulted another woman who was hiking alone at approximately 5:45 a.m. in Wildwood Regional Park, in Thousand Oaks. Ruelas stalked the victim through the park before jumping out from behind bushes wearing all black and a face covering. Ruelas took the victim to the ground, straddled her, and groped her. The victim told him she had already called the police and her husband, which caused Ruelas to flee. Surveillance video captured a vehicle owned by Ruelas speeding away from the trailhead and through the surrounding neighborhood. That vehicle would later be found at Ruelas' Woodland Hills apartment complex.

In the early morning hours of October 25, 2017, Ruelas entered a Thousand Oaks apartment through an open door while the victim and her boyfriend were sleeping. The victim awoke to find Ruelas standing over her. Ruelas placed one hand over the victim's mouth and sexually assaulted her with his other hand. Eventually, the hand covering the victim's mouth shifted and as she called out to her boyfriend, Ruelas fled out the door. The victim's boyfriend chased down Ruelas and struggled with him, until Ruelas ultimately broke free and fled.

The next charged assault occurred on April 12, 2019, at approximately 5:40 p.m. on a hiking trail, in Oak Park. Ruelas emerged from bushes along the trail wearing all black and a ski mask. He tackled the victim to the ground and grabbed at her clothing as she fought back. The victim screamed for help as she struggled with Ruelas. The victim told Ruelas that others knew her location, causing Ruelas to flee. The victim returned to the trailhead where she encountered a dogwalker who called 911.

The fifth and final charged attack was against a 16-year-old victim on a hiking trail near her home in Oak Park, the afternoon of March 5, 2020. Ruelas again emerged from bushes, dressed in black, wearing a mask, and gloves. He pushed the victim to the ground and used his hand to cover her mouth. The victim screamed for help and struck Ruelas with a ukulele she was carrying. She escaped down the trail until she found a neighbor who helped her call her family and 911. Ventura County Sheriff's deputies responded to the scene and recovered surveillance video from the neighborhood. The video showed the victim walking into the open space trails, and 30 seconds

later a vehicle consistent with one owned by Ruelas parked nearby. The driver exited the vehicle and headed toward the same trail utilized by the victim. Approximately 23 minutes later, the video captured the driver running back to his car and driving away.

Detectives with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office were able to identify the license plate on the vehicle after they determined that a patrol vehicle with a license plate reader had passed through the area near the time of the attack. This provided Ruelas' license plate information which eventually led to his arrest. Detectives conducted significant investigations to identify the other crimes perpetrated by Ruelas.

DNA testing was performed by forensic scientists with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office Forensic Services Bureau. Ruelas' DNA was linked to items of evidence obtained from each of these attacks, except for the attack occurring in Wildwood Regional Park.

Ruelas is scheduled to be sentenced on June 5, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. in courtroom 46 of the Ventura County Superior Court. He faces a maximum possible sentence of 32 years to life, plus 21 additional years.

Case: 2020007916

Defendant Information:

Edgar Rodriguez Ruelas (DOB 03/24/82)
Woodland Hills

Convicted of:

- PC 220(a)(2) – Assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime on a person under 18
- (2 counts) PC 220 – Assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime
- PC 289(a)(1) – Forcible sexual penetration by a foreign object
- PC 220(b) – Assault with intent to commit a forcible sex crime during a residential burglary

Special Allegations

- PC 667.61(d)(4) – Commit offense during a residential burglary with intent to commit a forcible sex crime
- CRC 4.421(a)(3) – Victim was vulnerable
- CRC 4.421(a)(8) The manner in which the crime was carried out indicates planning, sophistication, or professionalism
- CRC 4.421(b)(1) – Defendant has engaged in violent conduct



