

OUTSTANDING POLICE DUTY AWARD: Justin Salinas

In 2010, the City of Salinas had a number of murders that took place in the early morning hours. They seemed to be random yet similar in nature. Investigators believed a small group of gang members were involved. Investigative leads were showing the group was out hunting for potential victims that may look like gang members.

After one of the homicides was committed, detectives were able to gather crucial information implicating several gang members. The information linked several murders, shootings, robberies and burglaries to a small but lethal group of gang members.

Despite many investigative roadblocks, investigators continued to gather intelligence supporting a criminal conspiracy. Hundreds of hours of investigation, intelligence gathering and good old fashioned police work helped build a case that ultimately was elevated to the federal level with the United States Attorney's Office.

Nearly a year later, the United States Attorney's Office adopted the case, assigned a prosecutor who moved the case forward for federal indictments. The case was titled "Operation Day Break" based upon the time of day most of these serious crimes occurred.

In November 2015, the United States Department of Justice in conjunction with the Salinas Police Department announced a 73 count federal indictment of nine gang members and gang associates. The indictment charged racketeering, murder, attempted murder, armed bank robbery, robbery affecting interstate commerce, possession and use of firearms during the commission of the listed crimes. The indictment alleged that over a two-year period, between 2008 and 2010, the defendants committed twelve murders, seven attempted murders, and seven bank robberies in Salinas as well as robberies in Watsonville and San Jose.

All defendants are currently in federal custody with the exception of one who is in South Bend, Indiana facing homicide and attempted homicide charges in that state. Investigators worked closely with the FBI and the United States Attorney's office to bring these crimes to prosecution.

This investigation has had a positive effect upon the safety of the Salinas Community. The indictments put forth against the criminal street gang members demonstrates Salinas Police Departments resolution in fighting violence in the city and our relentless pursuit of justice for victims of violent crime. It is for these reasons these officers are being awarded the Salinas Police Department's Outstanding Police Duty Award.