

# City man is jailed in 7-year-old murder case

By Libby Avery

STAFF WRITER

Police yesterday arrested a Corpus Christi man in connection with the brutal slaying seven years ago of a 27-year-old woman who was found with an "X" carved in her back.

The man arrested yesterday was a key defense witness in a trial six years ago that cleared another man of the woman's murder.

Police said they arrested Carlos Hernandez, 32, of 1201 S. Alameda St., at a friend's home after a seven-hour search.

Hernandez was in City Jail last night in lieu of a \$25,000 bond set by District Judge Jack Blackmon. He is expected to be transferred to the Nueces County Jail at 9 a.m. today.

The search for Hernandez began after he was indicted by the Nueces County

*The 27-year-old victim's body was found with an 'X' carved in her back. The woman's 2-year-old child was found asleep just feet away.*

Grand Jury Wednesday afternoon in connection with the death of Dahlia Saucedo.

Police Lt. P. Gutierrez said Hernandez was arrested at 10:55 a.m. yesterday at a friend's home on Seventh Street, by Sgts. Paul Rivera and Eddie Garza, with the assistance of Sgt. Robert De La Garza.

Rivera said there have always been questions about Hernandez's possible involvement in the Saucedo death, but police didn't have enough evidence to arrest him. Police reopened the investigation several months ago after receiv-

ing new evidence, which Gutierrez would not disclose.

The case began Nov. 20, 1979, when two school boys discovered Mrs. Saucedo's nude, beaten and blood-stained body in the back of her van parked in a lot near Mexico and Mussel streets.

An "X" had been carved in Mrs. Saucedo's back, and she had been strangled with a pair of jeans. The woman's 2-year-old daughter was found sleeping in the van near her mother's body.

In 1980, 19-year-old Jesse Z. Garza was indicted and tried for the murder,

but an eight-man, four-woman jury found him not guilty.

Albert Pena, Garza's attorney, told the *Caller* yesterday he subpoenaed Hernandez during the trial to help prove his client's innocence.

At the trial, Hernandez admitted he had sex with Mrs. Saucedo on the night she was murdered, and the autopsy showed she had engaged in sexual activity within 12 hours of her death. Police discovered Hernandez's fingerprints and underwear in the van.

Pena said Hernandez's testimony was an important factor in the not-guilty verdict. Pena said he asked the jury during closing arguments at the trial to recommend that police re-examine what involvement Hernandez may have had in the murder.

Ken Botary, who prosecuted the case

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## Arrest

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and now is an attorney in private practice, said statements from Pedro Olivarez, a friend of Garza's, had convinced him Garza killed Mrs. Saucedo. Olivarez had told police that he watched Garza rape and kill the woman.

Olivarez was not eager to testify when the case came to trial, Botary said. At that time, Olivarez told the prosecutor Garza had not raped Mrs. Saucedo. Botary said prosecutors decided to continue with the case, believing Olivarez was just reluctant to testify against his friend, but would still tell his story, Botary said.

"I was convinced Jesse was the culprit. We tried the case as best we could," Botary said. "Pedro wasn't a strong witness."

In light of the new evidence uncovered by investigators, Botary said he no longer is convinced Garza killed Mrs. Saucedo.

After the trial, the jury's foreman said the panel concluded Olivarez's testimony left doubts about Garza's involvement in the murder. Jurors also thought police and the district attorney's office had done a poor job of investigating the case.