



**ERIK NASARENKO**  
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
**NEWS RELEASE**



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## Remaining Fairgrounds Burglary Crew Members Sentenced

VENTURA, Calif. – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that the three remaining defendants who stole more than \$572,000 from the Ventura County Fairgrounds in 2022 have been sentenced. The two actual burglars were sentenced to prison, while their lookout/driver was sentenced to a jail term.

“This was a well-planned crime, committed by an organized burglary crew from Los Angeles,” District Attorney Erik Nasarenko said. “We will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to vigorously investigate and prosecute sophisticated criminals and send a message that Ventura County is not a soft target.”

Rafael Morales (DOB 10/24/66), of La Puente, and Jesus Rios (DOB 03/12/67), of El Monte, were sentenced to 3 years 6 months prison. Morales and Rios had previously pled guilty on August 15, 2023, to four felony counts including misappropriation of public money, commercial burglary, and grand theft. They also pled guilty to prowling, a misdemeanor.

Carlos Aranda (DOB 02/26/79), of Los Angeles, was sentenced to 364 days in Ventura County Jail and two years felony probation. He had also pled guilty on August 15, 2023, to one felony count of misappropriation of public money. All three men admitted enhancements alleging that the scheme involved planning, sophistication, and professionalism and a taking of great monetary value.

A fourth man, Alexander Piceno (DOB 02/07/95), of Baldwin Park, is already serving three years in state prison for his role in the burglary. Piceno was sentenced on June 28, 2023, after pleading guilty to three felony counts.

Morales, Rios, Aranda, and Piceno conspired to burglarize the Ventura County Fairgrounds administration building. This occurred in the middle of the night on August 10, 2022, during the annual Ventura County Fair. The men were able to steal \$572,020 from a safe located inside that building.

Senior Deputy District Attorney Marc Leventhal, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Special Prosecutions Fraud and Technology Crimes Unit, commended the California Highway Patrol for developing the evidence that led to the identification and successful prosecution of the suspects.

"The CHP immediately recognized this was an inside job and conducted a thorough investigation to identify the four perpetrators," Leventhal said. "They used video surveillance footage in and around the crime scene, along with license plate reader hits on vehicles registered to Aranda and Rios. The guilty pleas in this case are a validation of that excellent investigative work."

Piceno was the insider who enabled the burglary to succeed. He worked for the company that processed cash receipts for the fair. He left the front door of the building unlocked for burglars Morales and Rios. He also informed Morales where to find the combination to unlock the safe. Rios recruited his friend Aranda to be the lookout and getaway driver. All four suspects were arrested on March 2, 2023. The stolen funds were never recovered.

Along with the prison and jail sentences, all defendants were ordered to pay restitution to the 31<sup>st</sup> District Agricultural Association in the sum of \$577,598.83.

Case: 2023005126

**Defendant Information:**



Rafael Morales (DOB 10/24/66)  
La Puente

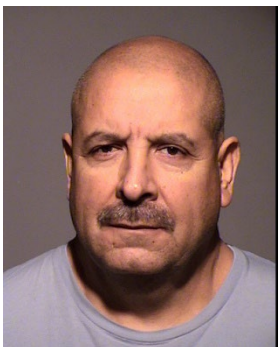
Jesus Rios (DOB 03/12/67)  
El Monte

**Charges pled guilty to:**

- PC 424(a)(1) – Misappropriation of public money
- PC 459 – Commercial Burglary over \$950
- PC 487(a) – Grand theft
- PC 182(a)(1) – Conspiracy to commit a crime
- PC 647(h) - Prowling

**Special Allegations:**

- CRC 4.421(a)(4) - The defendant induced others to participate in the commission of the crime or occupied a position of leadership or dominance of other participants in its commission
- CRC 4.421(a)(8) - The manner in which the crime was carried out indicates planning, sophistication, or professionalism
- CRC 4.421(a)(9) - The crime involved an attempted or actual taking or damage of great monetary value
- CRC 4.421(b)(2) - The defendant's prior convictions as an adult or sustained petitions in juvenile delinquency proceedings are numerous or of increasing seriousness



Carlos Aranda (DOB 02/26/79)  
Los Angeles

**Charges pled guilty to:**

- PC 424(a)(1) – Misappropriation of public money

**Special Allegations:**

- CRC 4.421(a)(8) - The manner in which the crime was carried out indicates planning, sophistication, or professionalism
- CRC 4.421(a)(9) - The crime involved an attempted or actual taking or damage of great monetary value



Alexander Piceno (DOB 02/07/95)  
Baldwin Park

**Charges pled guilty to:**

- PC 424(a)(1) – Misappropriation of public money
- PC 459 – Commercial Burglary over \$950
- PC 182(a)(1) – Conspiracy to commit a crime