

TODAY Settlement reached in rape suit

CRIME & CRISIS

Murder trial is set for former officer

By LISA MARIE GOMEZ
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

BROWNSVILLE — A former Brownsville police officer faces a May 3 trial on charges of first-degree murder in connection with the death of Laura Lugo.

Lugo died one month after being reunited with her youngest child following a two-year search for a baby boy allegedly stolen from her womb in a case that attracted international publicity.

Roberto Guadalupe Briseno was arraigned Wednesday in state District Judge Roberto Garza's court.

Briseno served 19 years as an officer in the Brownsville Police Department. He is accused of shooting Lugo in the head six times in late December 1994.

According to court records, Lugo was lured from her apartment by Janet Ramirez Lozano to a wooded area northeast of Brownsville, where another former city police officer, Randall Ledbetter, gave Briseno the bullets to kill Lugo.

A Cameron County grand jury Feb. 24 indicted Briseno, 44, and

"Briseno served 19 years as an officer in the Brownsville Police Department. He's accused of shooting Lugo in the head six times in late December 1994."

Ledbetter, 30, on one count of murder each.

In a January plea bargain, Lozano, 28, pleaded guilty to murder and agreed to testify against the two former police officers in exchange for a 20-year prison sentence.

Lugo, 28, previously had been involved in a bizarre baby snatching.

Her baby allegedly was stolen from her womb during a Caesarean section at a Matamoros clinic. Lugo had befriended two women who convinced her to go to the clinic.

By ADOLFO PESQUERA
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

A North Side apartment complex landlord has agreed to pay \$1.5 million in a settlement to a woman who accused the owner and manager of negligence when she was gang-raped.

The defendant, Ki O. Choe, owner of the Amber Square Apartments at 2741 Woodbury Place, settled after a jury decided Wednesday in favor of the woman and awarded her \$2.5 million.

Judge Carol Haberman of the 45th District Court gave Choe and

his insurers — State Farm Insurance and Lloyd's — 20 days to pay the settlement sum and court costs.

Choe was accused of negligence because he and his agents didn't provide adequate security and didn't remove uninvited nonresidents.

In effect, he "maintained a facility which encouraged criminal behavior," according to court records, by "allowing nonresidents to congregate, consume alcoholic beverages, use or sell drugs, harass tenants and loiter unhindered."

Alex Katzman, the woman's attorney, presented witnesses — other tenants and police — who testified that at noon June 10, 1997, a man masturbated in front of the woman's apartment.

The woman called police and made a report to officer Herbert Smith. She also complained to the apartment complex manager.

Later that evening, several people attacked the woman in her apartment. The sexual assault lasted about six hours, according to court testimony.

Police Capt. Tyrone Powers,

testifying as a plaintiff's witness, said a "crime of this magnitude was foreseeable."

Powers noted that an abundance of graffiti and a broken perimeter fence were evidence that security maintenance was inadequate at the complex.

A renter also testified that residents had complained to management for months prior to the attack.

Lazaro Alarcon del Toro, 36, is in Bexar County Jail and awaiting trial on a charge that he committed aggravated sexual assault.



Father faces capital murder charge in baby's death: The 18-year-old father of a baby girl who died Jan. 15 was charged Wednesday with capital murder and was being held in Hays County Jail.

Bond was set at \$1.5 million for Robert A. Alexander of Meyers Road in Buda.

He called 911 Jan. 15 to report his 13-month-old daughter, Kierra Monae Alexander, wasn't breathing. She was declared dead on the scene.

An autopsy by the Travis County medical examiner's office ruled the cause of death to be "blunt force injury to the infant's abdomen" and placed the time of the injury at four to eight hours before the time of death.

Alexander was arrested without incident at 8:35 a.m. Wednesday in San Marcos.

Hays County Detective Jeri Skrocki said the investigation was continuing, but she didn't

anticipate any charges against the mother, Kristen Crawford. The couple have no other children.

"We believe the mom was at work at the time," Skrocki said. "The father was unemployed and was the primary caregiver."

She said Alexander never gave a detailed statement to police, but said he had no idea how his daughter could have been injured.

California woman killed in Gillespie accident: A California woman died early Wednesday in a one-car accident on Interstate 10 in Gillespie County that police say was caused by heavy winds.

Candice Heuklom, 22, of Vista, Calif., was ejected from the 1993 Jeep in which she was a passenger when it flipped at 4:35 a.m. Wednesday, police said. She wasn't wearing a seat belt.

Gillespie County Justice of the Peace Tamara Keener pronounced Heuklom dead at the scene.

The accident report filed by Department of Public Safety Trooper Keith Olive said Jaelyn Potter, 22, of Massachusetts, had just driven out of the eastbound rest area at I-10 mile marker 498 when a strong gust of wind hit her Jeep, causing it to swerve.

Potter overcorrected, and the vehicle left the road, hit an embankment, and flipped, police said.

Potter and another passenger suffered minor injuries, police said.

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