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ESCAPED PRISONER CONVICTED OF CARJACKING RESULTING IN DEATH

*After escaping from prison in Colorado in 2003, defendant
carjacked and murdered an Israeli citizen*

Lake Charles, Louisiana . . . JONATHAN LEE VERNIER, age 36, was convicted today by a jury in Lake Charles for carjacking resulting in the death of an Israeli citizen, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. VERNIER committed the violent carjacking and killing after he escaped from prison in Colorado in 2003.

VERNIER was charged in a Superseding Indictment in December 2005 with one count of carjacking with intent to cause death or serious bodily harm. This indictment followed a lengthy investigation into the death of Ran Mesika, an Israeli citizen who was visiting the United States. The investigation revealed that in late April 2003, Mesika stopped along U.S. Interstate 10 in Texas to offer a ride to VERNIER, who was hitchhiking after a recent escape from prison in Colorado. VERNIER had stolen a number of vehicles after his escape. In each case, he would drive the vehicle until it ran out of gasoline, and then locate the next means of transportation. After Mesika stopped to offer VERNIER a ride, the two men traveled from Texas to Louisiana. They made a number of stops along I-10 and, according to trial testimony from VERNIER,

in early May 2003 he struck Mesika with a tire iron in the parking lot of a Wal-Mart located in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The blow from the tire iron killed Mesika. VERNIER later disposed of Mesika's body and took Mesika's van, identification information, ATM card, jewelry, and money as he continued to travel from Louisiana, through Mississippi, and further into Key West, Florida.

After Ran Mesika's family and friends in Israel stopped getting phone calls from him, and learned that unusual ATM withdrawals were being made from Ran Mesika's credit card, an investigation as to his whereabouts began. FBI agents from Louisiana to Florida began tracking ATM and credit card transactions and were led to Key West, Florida, where agents located Mesika's van and apprehended VERNIER. Although several searches have been conducted by members of the Mesika family, friends, and law enforcement officers, Ran Mesika's remains have not yet been found.

VERNIER was prosecuted by federal prosecutors in Florida for ATM and credit card transaction, and received a 17 year sentence. He was later transported to Louisiana for federal prosecution related to the carjacking resulting in death charge.

U.S. Attorney Washington stated: "We are pleased that the jury rendered a guilty verdict. Still, we must do whatever we can to help the Mesika family locate their son's remains. We continue to request local and remote landowners along I-10 from Lake Charles to Crowley, Louisiana to conduct a search of their land for any signs of human remains or clothing."

VERNIER faces a federal prison sentence of up to life in prison. Judge Patricia Minaldi has set a sentencing hearing for VERNIER for August 8, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. in her court in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Lake Charles Resident Agency, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joseph T. Mickel and J. Collin Sims.

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