

## Three Indicted in Hightower Homicide

Thursday, 13 October 2016 11:40 -

---

The Columbia County Grand Jury has indicted three suspects in the murder of Apache Hightower. Following an investigation that spanned three weeks and locations from a rural Columbia County roadway to the Cities of St. Helens, Portland and Santa Barbara, Calif., investigators were able to secure indictments in the case, charging each suspect with aggravated murder, and numerous other crimes.

Jesse Allen Lane, 28, Medford, is charged with: four counts of Aggravated Murder; one count of Murder, one count of Felony Murder; two Counts of Kidnapping First Degree; one count of Felon in Possession of a Firearm; one count of Strangulation; and two counts of Hindering Prosecution;

Charles William Vernon, 29, St. Helens is charged with: three counts of Aggravated Murder; one count of Murder, one count of Felony Murder; two Counts of Kidnapping First Degree; one count of Felon in Possession of a firearm; and, one count of Hindering Prosecution.

Stephanie Toney, 20, St. Helens is charged with: two counts of Aggravated Murder; one count of Murder, one count of Felony Murder; two Counts of Kidnapping First Degree; and, two counts of Hindering Prosecution

"This incident is so sad for the needless loss of life and the tremendous sorrow for Ms. Hightower's family," said Sheriff Jeff Dickerson, "but I am extremely proud of the way investigators doggedly stayed on top of this case to produce this relatively quick result."

Hundreds of hours of investigation on the part of the small, but determined Columbia County Major Crimes Team brought the case from an unidentified murder victim discarded down an embankment off of Pittsburg Rd to the identification of three suspects involved in the kidnapping, assault and murder of Ms. Hightower. Investigators had the assistance of the Oregon Medical Examiner's Office, the Oregon State Police Forensics Laboratory, the Portland Police Bureau, the United State's Marshal's fugitive task force, the FBI, the Jackson County District Attorney's Office, the Jackson County Sheriff's Office, the Oregon State Parole Board, the Columbia County Department of Community Justice, the Santa Barbara Police Department and the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office in bringing this case before the grand jury just three weeks after the discovery of Ms. Hightower's body.

"We had a lot of help that was crucial to the success of this investigation," the sheriff said, "and we had a small number of dedicated members of the Major Crimes Team working daily with the Columbia County District Attorney's Office to build this case."

## **Three Indicted in Hightower Homicide**

Thursday, 13 October 2016 11:40 -

---

The three individuals charged in the murder were arraigned in the courtroom located in the Columbia County Jail at 11:30 this morning. The investigation is still continuing.

The family of Apache Hightower has expressed their desire for no contact from the news media, requesting all media requests for information to come through this office.