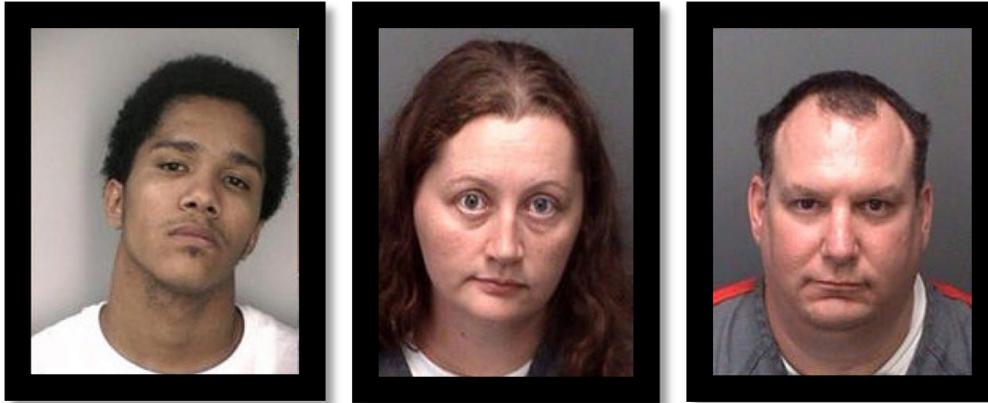


# 4 Convicted in Lithia Murder-for-Hire Scheme Following 5-Year Investigation



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Following a weeklong trial in federal court, Luis Angel Lopez, 25, was found guilty this week in connection with the murder of Thomas Sehorne, 42, of 10815 Lithia-Pinecrest Rd., Lithia, five years ago.

Lopez' conviction culminates a five-year investigation into a murder-for-hire scheme.

Cristie Sehorne-Bottorff, 34, wife of the murder victim, and her now-husband, Jerry Bottorff, 42, pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit murder July 9. A fourth defendant in the case, Michael Garcia, has been cooperating with detectives. All four defendants face life in federal prison.

The investigation began June 6, 2007, when the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call at 8:08 a.m. from Cristie Sehorne who reported that she'd discovered the body of her husband, Thomas Sehorne, lying on the carport just outside their home.

Deputies responded and discovered Sehorne had been shot twice in the stomach.

During an interview with Cristie Sehorne, she admitted she was involved in a romantic relationship with Jerry Bottorff, a man she'd met at a local swingers club.

Detectives interviewed Jerry Bottorff who confirmed that he and Cristie Sehorne were in a relationship. But Bottorff denied having any knowledge about the death of Thomas Sehorne.

Digging deeper, detectives discovered there had been several phone calls between Cristie Sehorne, Bottorff and a man named Michael Garcia.

When questioned, Garcia said he'd met the couple at the Pleasure Palace club in Tampa and was later hired by Cristie Sehorne to do landscaping at her home.

The case, however, stalled until May 6, 2008, when Detective Thomas Pettis received a telephone call from Lana Garcia, the wife of Michael Garcia, who said her husband had been paid \$5,000 to kill Thomas Sehorne. She added that a man named Luis Lopez helped him commit the murder.

Michael Garcia was interviewed and admitted that he was approached by Jerry Bottorff who asked if he knew anyone who would be interested in committing a murder for money.

Over the next several months, Garcia said both Bottorff and Cristie Sehorne contacted him weekly to find out if he'd been able to locate someone to commit the murder. Garcia introduced Luis Lopez to Bottorff and Sehorne who agreed to pay Garcia and Lopez \$60,000 from an insurance policy Cristie Sehorne expected to receive upon her husband's death.

Garcia said Jerry Bottorff returned several days later and offered him a \$5,000 down payment.

On the day of the murder, Garcia said Lopez went to his home armed with a handgun. Together, they drove to Sehorne's home where Lopez shot Sehorne. Afterward, Garcia and Lopez threw the clothing they'd been wearing into a trash can at a car wash on U.S. 301 near the Alafia River and then threw the gun into the river.

The sheriff's Underwater Recovery Team recovered the gun from the river on Feb. 25, 2009.

Garcia and Lopez were arrested and charged with Sehorne's murder.

Garcia agreed to cooperate with detectives. On Aug. 18, 2009, Garcia contacted Bottorff by telephone to discuss getting his payment for Sehorne's murder. Bottorff agreed to meet a representative for Garcia at the McDonald's at the intersection of Bloomingdale Avenue and Bell Shoals Road.

When Bottorff showed up at the McDonald's with an envelope containing \$6,000, he was met by undercover detectives posing as friends of Garcia's.

On Nov. 18, 2009, Garcia called Bottorff again to demand the remaining \$54,000 owed to him. During the recorded conversation, Bottorff acknowledged that he owed Bottorff the money but didn't have access to it yet. Garcia continued to hound Bottorff for the money and, on June 7, 2010, Bottorff agreed to pay Garcia another \$6,000.

Once again, they arranged for the pay-off to take place at the McDonald's on Bloomingdale Avenue. Now married to Bottorff, Christie Sehorne-Bottorff came along with Bottorff for the delivery. Once again, an undercover detective was on hand to accept the money.

The pay-off provided detectives with enough evidence to arrest the couple for conspiracy to commit murder.

Source:

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