

**District Attorney's
Office**
State of North Carolina
26th Prosecutorial District
Mecklenburg County

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NEWS RELEASE

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Jury convicts man of first-degree murder

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – The man who shot and killed a 41-year-old new father in front of a South Boulevard restaurant was found guilty of first-degree murder. The trial, which began on January 29, 2024 ended today with the jury's guilty verdict. The Honorable Justin N. Davis, Superior Court Judge, presided over the trial.

The Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Homicide Team tried Juan Deras Escalante, 23, for 1) first-degree murder and 2) four counts of discharging a firearm into occupied property. The jury found him *guilty* as charged. Judge Davis then sentenced Escalante to life without the possibility of parole for the murder charge and 100-168 months for the remaining charges.

On April 29, 2019, Escalante and his co-defendant, Gerardo Lagunes, both under 21-years-old at the time, were at a South Boulevard restaurant and asked Domingo Venencio-Tapia to purchase alcohol for them. Mr. Venencio-Tapia refused their request. Escalante and Lagunes got into a car, pulled out of the parking lot, then stopped in front of the restaurant where Escalante fired five shots towards the business. One of the shots hit and killed Mr. Venencio-Tapia.

Lagunes previously pled guilty in connection with the crimes.

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