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Charges filed in brutal 2011 hammer death of Utah woman

By Jessica Miller The Salt Lake Tribune

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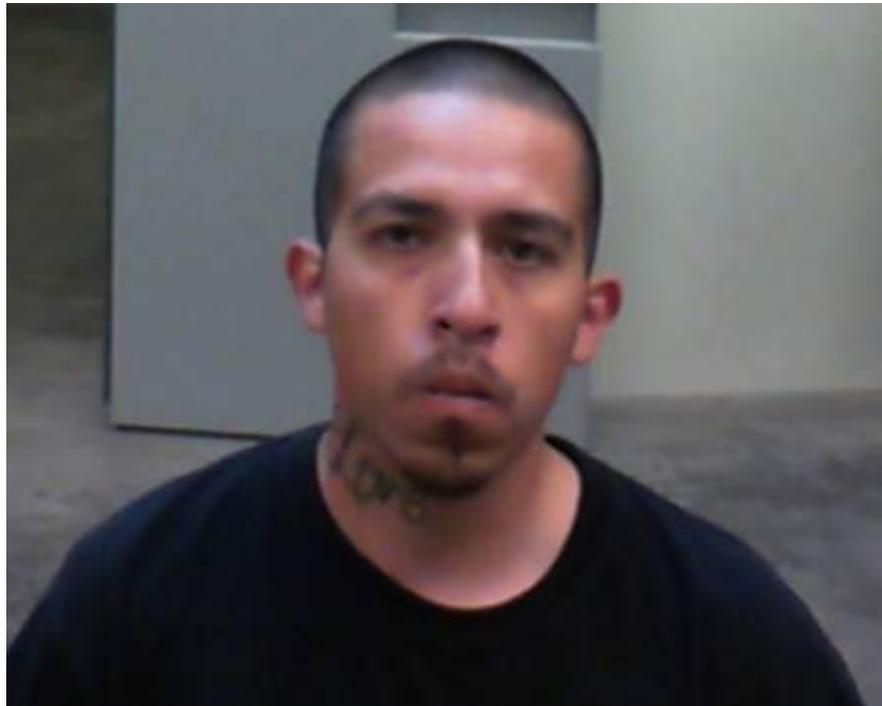
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Courts • West Valley City man faces up to life in prison if convicted for the 2011 slaying.

A Utah man accused of murdering a 69-year-old woman in her home in 2011 was charged Monday in the brutal slaying.



Rogelio Diaz

Rogelio Diaz Jr., a 23-year-old from West Valley City, was charged Monday in 3rd District Court with first-degree felony murder in Evelynne Derricott's death. He was also charged with first-degree felony aggravated burglary and second-degree felony theft.

Police believe Diaz — who was arrested Friday — used a hammer to kill the woman, a widow who lived by herself, while he was burglarizing her home.

Derricott's body was found in her home, at 410 W. Havasu Street in Tooele, by a friend on Oct. 7, 2011.

Diaz, who could face a maximum penalty of up to life in prison if convicted, is expected to make his first court appearance on Wednesday, according to court records.

Diaz was solidly linked to the slaying by DNA collected several weeks ago, according to police. It is the first time in Utah that police have used “familial DNA” to zero in on and arrest a suspect.

The investigation began to focus on someone in Diaz’s family after DNA found on the hammer and steering wheel of Derricott’s stolen car was found to match a close relative of Diaz’s whose DNA profile was in Utah’s DNA database — a database comprised of samples from people who have been convicted of a class A misdemeanor or felony crime.

Police have not said who that relative was. But Jay Henry, the laboratory director for the state’s crime lab, said Monday that familial DNA would most often match only the suspect’s closest relatives, like a father, brother or son.

Derricott’s murder is one of only two cases so far in Utah where familial DNA testing has been used, according to Henry, who declined to talk about the other case.

Henry said running familial DNA tests can use up a lot of staffer time and funding — he estimates the cost of a single test is between \$5,000 to \$7,000 right now — so there is a list of criteria for the kind of case they would consider taking on. They are usually cold cases, he said, in which a full DNA profile has been gathered from the scene. There also must be a large enough DNA sample that two separate tests can be run to confirm the familial connection.

Police also must have exhausted other leads, Henry said, and must be committed to pushing the case forward if there is a match.

If the crime lab determines that there is a strong likelihood of a match, Henry said they will give those results to the investigating police agency, who will then begin looking for suspects within that family line.

“It goes back to regular police work,” Henry said.

In Derricott’s murder, the police used information gathered by investigators to pinpoint Diaz, who lived in Tooele at the time of the crime, according to court records.

Police were apparently watching Diaz on April 22 when they saw him consume a Rockstar Energy drink and discard the can, as well as a pair of work gloves. Police collected the can and gloves and sent it to the state crime lab. The lab matched that DNA to the DNA found at the crime scene.

Utah court records show that Diaz's was convicted of misdemeanors in 2011 and 2012 for theft, possession of drug paraphernalia, alcohol consumption and failing to respond to a police officer's command.

An initial court appearance for Diaz in the murder case was set for Wednesday.

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