

*murder*

# COPS AND COU

## SANTA CRUZ

### Girlfriend now faces murder charge, too

A Texas woman and her boyfriend will both face a murder charge in the beating death of a disabled homeless man.

Tia Lauren Hitt, 20, and James Landrum Jones, 22, are set to be arraigned today in Santa Cruz County Superior Court on charges they beat and strangled 52-year-old Michael Todd Blanton on Feb. 10. Blanton's body was found Thursday night covered with shrubs near the San Lorenzo River, Santa Cruz police Lt. Joe Haebe said.

Hitt and Jones had been taken into custody earlier that day in an unrelated sex case. The pair directed police to the body, Haebe said.

Hitt originally had been arrested as an accessory to the crime, but evidence discovered over the weekend suggested she was a participant, Haebe said.



**BLANTON**

2-26-02  
Investigators believe the couple, both from the Fort Worth, Texas, area, killed Blanton after a dispute about a camp site. Prosecutor Christine McGuire said the couple beat and kicked Blanton, strangled him with a bicycle chain, then beat him with a large rock.

McGuire said Blanton was defenseless. His right hand had been amputated after an accident.

Hitt also is set to be charged with having unlawful sexual intercourse with a 14-year-old Santa Cruz male on Feb. 20, McGuire said.