

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DIVISION
JACKSON POLICE DEPARTMENT
PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walter Stitts Pleads Guilty to 1998 and 2008 Murders

On Monday Walter James Stitts, 49, of Jackson, admitted responsibility in the murders of two men. He pleaded guilty in Madison County Circuit Court, Division I, to charges of murder in perpetration of robbery and robbery in the 1998 homicide of Cornelius Martinez, 71, of Cedar Grove. He also pleaded guilty to murder in perpetration of robbery and robbery in the 2008 homicide of James Gruggett, 31, of Greenfield. Stitts was sentenced to life, with the possibility of parole, on both murders. He will be eligible for release at the age of 100, after serving 51 years.

Stitts was indicted by the grand jury on murder charges in July 2011, after the Jackson Police Department's Cold Case Investigative Unit evaluated and built on information that had been gathered over the years by previous Investigators. The Cold Case Unit's efforts lead to sufficient proof to proceed with charges

BACKGROUND:

On July 7, 1998, around 4:45 p.m., Jackson police received a call of a suspicious vehicle on the parking lot of Camp's Supermarket at 1013 E. Chester. A witness reported seeing the car parked in the same place since 6 a.m. the day before. When officers arrived, they determined that the car had not been reported stolen, appeared to be abandoned and had a foul odor emanating from the trunk. The car, which was registered to Martinez, was towed to the police department and a locksmith was called to open the trunk. Martinez's decomposed body was found inside. The cause of death was determined to be manual strangulation. The investigation indicated that he was robbed.

On September 21, 2008, around 3 p.m., Jackson police received a call that a man had been discovered unresponsive, lying face down, in a wooded area on the north side of Muse Park. He was identified as Gruggett. Evidence at the scene suggested that he at least been there overnight. The investigation concluded that he was robbed and the cause of death was traumatic asphyxia.

Stitts has been jailed since September 22, 2010, after he was arrested by Jackson police for an attack on Randall Christopher, then 60, of Big Sandy. Investigation showed that on September 19 Stitts strangled Christopher and left him unconscious on the south side of Muse Park. Stitts then took Christopher's wallet and car. He was sentenced to 15 years after pleading guilty to robbery, theft of property over \$1000 and violation of sex offender proximity regulations.

