

Nissensohn sentenced to death for 3 killings

By Kathryn Reed

Joseph Michael Nissensohn will never have the opportunity to hurt another woman. On Tuesday, a jury of 12 in South Lake Tahoe said he should die for his crimes.

In October, the 62-year-old was found guilty of three counts of first-degree murder.

The remains of Kathy Graves, 15, of South Lake were found near the Mount Tallac trailhead in 1990, about one year after she was last seen alive. Nissensohn also killed Monterey County teenagers Tanya Jones and Tammy Lynn Jarschke in 1981.



Joseph Michael Nissensohn

He has already been in prison 15 years for the second-degree murder of a woman in Tillicum, Wash. When he was supposed to get out in 2008 El Dorado and Monterey county prosecutors agreed to wrap their cases into one and filed charges before Nissensohn was freed.

It took jurors only 90 minutes to complete this phase of the more than six-month trial.

As soon as the clerk in the El Dorado County Superior Court

read the verdict Nissensohn was handcuffed. The entire time he sat staring straight ahead in the direction of Judge Suzanne Kingsbury.

“I wouldn’t say it was disturbing, but you definitely feel a lot of responsibility is on your shoulders,” Bob Grant, one of the jurors, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Dec. 10 sentencing verdict. “You are very careful to pay attention in court to make sure you get the right verdict.”

El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Pete Van Arnum was in the courtroom. Afterward he called Nissensohn a dangerous man. Van Arnum was with a different department when Grave’s skull was found near Fallen Leaf Lake.

He said it’s good Nissensohn was sentenced to death; pausing to wonder if these are the only crimes the criminal committed.

Nissensohn is scheduled to be formally sentenced March 18.

Since El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson was elected in 2007 his office has pursued the death penalty three times and has won them each time. Prior to today, David Zanon was the last person sent to Death Row from El Dorado County. This was three years ago for the murder of California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Russell.

California has more than 700 inmates on Death Row. Clarence Ray Allen on Jan. 17, 2007, was the last person executed. The controversy of using lethal injection is creating the logjam.