



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Office of the District Attorney
Twelfth Judicial District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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12th Judicial District Attorney's Office Announces Sentencing of Deana Thetford for Murder of Missing Cloudcroft Man

Defendant pleaded guilty to Second-Degree Murder, Tampering with Evidence, and Forgery following a five-month investigation spanning multiple states.

ALAMOGORDO, N.M., June 4, 2026, 12th Judicial District Attorney Ryan Suggs announces that Deana Thetford has been sentenced to 18 years in the New Mexico Department of Corrections following her guilty plea to Second-Degree Murder, Tampering with Evidence, and Forgery in connection with the death of her husband, Craig Thetford.

Craig Thetford, a resident of Cloudcroft, New Mexico, was last seen in January 2025. After months without contact, family members reported him missing in May 2025. The Otero County Sheriff's Office initiated a welfare check at the couple's residence in Cloudcroft but found no sign of Craig Thetford.

During the investigation, Deana Thetford provided multiple conflicting explanations regarding her husband's whereabouts. She initially claimed that Craig had left for Mexico with another woman, later stating he was conducting firefighter training in Albuquerque, caring for his mother in Texas, and eventually working in Texas. Investigators quickly determined that these claims were inconsistent with available evidence.

In May 2025, investigators received an anonymous Crime Stoppers tip alleging that Deana Thetford had shot and killed her husband following an altercation inside their Cloudcroft home. This information prompted an extensive investigation involving search warrants, forensic analysis, financial records, cellular phone records, credit card records, GPS data, and interviews conducted across multiple states.

The investigation revealed that during the first week of January 2025, Deana Thetford shot and killed Craig Thetford inside their residence. Evidence established that Craig Thetford suffered at least three gunshot wounds.

Investigators further discovered that Deana Thetford spent more than five months concealing the crime. Evidence showed that she cleaned the crime scene, repaired damage caused by the shooting, concealed Craig Thetford's remains in plastic and a rug, covered the remains with lime, and stored them in the residence's carport. During the welfare check conducted by law enforcement, prior to

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the anonymous tip, Deana Thetford had been operating on a backhoe near the carport and claimed she was preparing an above-ground garden. Next to the carport was a recently dug hole approximately 6-7 feet in length and 2-3 feet deep.

The investigation also revealed a prolonged effort to deceive family members and law enforcement. Deana Thetford sent fabricated text messages and Facebook messages while impersonating Craig Thetford, forged records using his signature, and repeatedly provided false information regarding his whereabouts.

On June 2, 2026, Deana Thetford appeared before the Honorable Stephen P. Ochoa and entered guilty pleas to Second-Degree Murder, Tampering with Evidence, and Forgery. Judge Ochoa immediately sentenced her to 18 years in the New Mexico Department of Corrections.

The case was investigated by the 12th Judicial District Major Crimes Unit with assistance from the New Mexico State Police Crime Scene Team and the Texas Rangers. Investigators executed numerous search warrants in New Mexico and Texas and analyzed extensive amounts of physical, digital, financial, and location-based evidence. Through meticulous investigative work, law enforcement was able to reconstruct a detailed timeline spanning more than six months and accurately track Deana Thetford's movements across multiple states.

The case was prosecuted by 12th Judicial District Attorney Ryan Suggs.

"I am extremely proud of the work done by our law enforcement partners and my office during the course of this investigation," said District Attorney Ryan Suggs. "There was no stone left unturned in this investigation, and each and every member of the team remained fully committed to this case from beginning to end. Through their dedication and tireless efforts, we were able to bring closure and justice to the family of Craig Thetford, who spent more than five months searching for answers while being repeatedly deceived about his whereabouts."

The 12th Judicial District Attorney's Office extends its condolences to the family and loved ones of Craig Thetford. While no sentence can undo the loss suffered by his family, this resolution brings accountability for those responsible and serves as a testament to the determination of the investigators and prosecutors who pursued justice on his behalf.