



Powered by Clickability

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

DNA frees man after 24 years in prison

TAMPA, Florida (AP) -- Alan Crotzer stepped into the warm sunlight outside the courthouse Monday and raised his arms to the sky, celebrating his freedom after more than 24 years behind bars for crimes he didn't commit.

A judge freed the 45-year-old Crotzer after DNA testing and other evidence convinced prosecutors he was not involved in the 1981 armed robbery and rapes that led to his 130-year prison sentence.

"It's been a long time coming," said Crotzer, his black hair graying at the temples. "Thank God for this day."

Crotzer walked free more than three years after he wrote to the Innocence Project in New York, a legal clinic that seeks to exonerate inmates through DNA testing.

"Are you ready for what you waited so long to hear?" Circuit Judge J. Rogers Padgett said to Crotzer during the brief hearing. "Motion granted - you're a free man."

Members of Crotzer's family and other courtroom spectators clapped and cheered as a bailiff removed the shackles from his wrists and ankles.

Prosecutor Mike Sinacore congratulated him. "Trying to fix an error in the system is just as important as trying to convict someone who is guilty," he said.

DNA has been used to clear at least 172 people wrongly convicted of crimes in 31 states since 1989, according to the Innocence Project.

Crotzer and brothers Douglas James and Corlenzo James were convicted of robbing a Tampa family in 1981. Douglas James and Crotzer were also found guilty of kidnapping and raping a 38-year-old woman and her 12-year-old girl at gunpoint.

A victim picked Crotzer out of a photo lineup. But Douglas James says Crotzer is innocent. He said he and his brother were the rapists and a childhood friend was their accomplice.

Crotzer, who has never held a paying job, said he will go live with a sister in St. Petersburg and try to find work. His attorneys said they will seek compensation from the state for him.

In December, Gov. Jeb Bush signed a bill allowing Wilton Dedge to receive \$2 million for the 22 years he spent in prison for a rape he did not commit. Dedge, 44, also was exonerated by DNA evidence.

"There ain't no compensation for what they done to me," said Crotzer, whose mother died while he was in prison. "But I'm not bitter."

Crotzer said he was looking forward to a barbecue with his family, who promised him his favorites -- pork chops and banana pudding. Then, he said, he wanted to take a bath in a real bathtub.

"I want to soak," he said. "I want to get some of this off me."

Copyright 2006 The [Associated Press](#). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/LAW/01/23/dna.exoneration.ap/index.html>

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#) Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

