



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Sue Lindsay

Public Information

303-835-5639

Teen Sentenced to Youth Corrections in Commerce City Crash that Killed Motorcyclist

Samantha Esparza (DOB 05/02/97) was sentenced to up to two years in the Division of Youth Corrections Friday for vehicular homicide while driving under the influence in the death of a motorcyclist in Commerce City last April.

Esparza pleaded guilty in January to charges of vehicular homicide DUI (F3) and misdemeanor third-degree assault. She had only a driver's permit and did not have a valid driver's license. Her blood alcohol content was .09 and she was speeding at least 53 mph on impact.

Gary Melillo, 52, was killed April 18, 2014 after Esparza, then 16, drove her 2005 Dodge Neon into oncoming traffic and hit Melillo as he rode his motorcycle in the 7200 block of Highway 2 in Commerce City.

Esparza had been drinking and had three other teens in the vehicle at the time of the crash at about 3 p.m. April 18, 2014. According to the arrest warrant in the case, she and a group of friends had left Adams City High School at about 11 a.m. and drove to Del Mar park in Aurora for another school's "senior ditch day". Alcoholic beverages were available at the park. Esparza took a bottle of whiskey with her when she left and was seen showing the bottle out of her car window to another car of teens.

Esparza was speeding and distracted by a cell phone or passengers in the vehicle when she drove onto the shoulder of southbound Highway 2 and then swerved to avoid striking a pole, fishtailing and ending up in northbound Highway 2 where she struck Melillo's motorcycle. He was ejected and Esparza's car rolled over, coming to a rest on its roof.

Esparza initially was charged as a juvenile and the case was transferred to District Court. She pleaded guilty as part of an agreement in which she pleaded guilty as an adult but would be sentenced as a juvenile.

"This is an unbelievable tragedy," Senior Deputy District Attorney Tariq Sheikh told the court. "Nothing can bring Gary Melillo back. It is amazing how many lives have been changed forever based on a couple of hours of bad decisions."

District Judge Katherine Delgado rejected a sentence to a juvenile detention center with probation, saying that the case was so serious that a punitive sentence was required. Delgado said Esparza's actions driving drunk and being distracted in the vehicle were a "deadly combination." The judge said she was deeply troubled to learn that Esparza's mother knew she was driving without a license and that her father two weeks ago was arrested for DUI "while his daughter faced sentencing for vehicular homicide."

"This tragic case illustrates all too well the dangers of teenagers drinking and driving," said District Attorney Dave Young. "An innocent man lost his life because of Samantha Esparza's actions. I hope this case sends a message to the community about the terrible consequences of drinking and driving."

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