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DRUNKEN DRIVER GETS 25 YEARS FRIENDS, FAMILY OF IRISH COED WHO DIED SOB AS VERDICT IS READ *ROBIN FITZGERALD/THE SUN HERALD*

COURTS: A Pass Christian man will serve 25 years in prison for drunken driving and leaving the scene of an accident that killed Traeacy Staunton. BILOXI --- Traeacy Staunton's family travelled 4,000 miles to seek justice, her father said Thursday after a judge sentenced Michael Joseph Kramm to 25 years for drunken driving in the hit-and-run accident that killed the college soccer player from Dublin, Ireland.

After two days of testimony, jurors deliberated 45 minutes before delivering three guilty verdicts in Staunton's death. She died Dec. 5, 2002, in Biloxi. Jurors found Kramm guilty of drunken driving, driving with a blood-alcohol level at or above the state limit of 0.08 percent and leaving the scene of an accident.

The 20-year-old coed's family and friends from William Carey College in Gulfport sighed collectively and sobbed quietly as the final verdict was read.

"It's justice for Traeacy, and it's justice for all innocent victims of drunk drivers," said her father, Tony Staunton.

Kramm, 28, of Pass Christian, did not testify. He looked straight ahead during most of the trial, showing no emotion until Circuit Court Judge Kosta Vlahos asked him if he had anything to say to the family.

"I've thought about this every day and hated myself," said the former casino dealer, his voice quivering. "I know I deserve to be punished, but I ask if you can find it in your heart to forgive me one day."

Traeacy Staunton coached children's soccer teams in Ireland before receiving a soccer scholarship to William Carey. She and four friends were waiting at a red light on U.S. 90 at Eisenhower Drive when Kramm's vehicle rear-ended their car around 1:20 a.m. Staunton was in the back seat.

She died at a local hospital about an hour after the accident.

Kramm faced a penalty of 30 years: five years for leaving the scene and 25 years each for the DUI convictions. The law allows prison time for the related DUI charges to run concurrently.

"He might not have received but 15 years if he had just thrown himself at the mercy of the court and shown remorse from the start," said Jerry Bracey, dean of William Carey.

The jury and the judge sent a message that drunken drivers must take responsibility for their actions, Assistant District Attorney Mark Ward said.

A videotaped interview from a patrol car minutes after the crash helped cinch the prosecution, Ward said. Jurors heard Kramm's voice, his speech slurred, admit he was drinking and had an accident after leaving "the Mississippi Sea Wolves casino."

The defense didn't have much of a case after Danielle Yarbrough testified, said **Wayne Woodall**, Kramm's attorney.

Yarbrough said the driver swerved on and off the highway, ran up an embankment, and never hit his brakes as he approached the red light. She followed the Explorer onto Scenic Drive to get his tag number. The driver turned into the U.S. Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Blood drawn from Kramm at 3:55 a.m., more than two hours later, indicated his blood-alcohol level was 0.20, said Maury Phillips of the state Crime Lab. It took a minimum of 10 beers to reach that level, said Phillips, who agreed with a witness for the defense that it wasn't possible to prove what the level was at the time of the accident.

A forensic toxicology consultant, testifying in Kramm's defense, largely agreed with the state toxicologist's testimony.

A Harrison County sheriff's deputy takes Michael Joseph Kramm into custody Thursday after jurors handed down three guilty verdicts in the courtroom of Circuit Court Judge Kosta Vlahos in Biloxi. Vlahos sentenced Kramm to 25 years in prison for the 2002 collision that killed 20-year-old Traeacy A. Staunton. Kramm was drunk when he rear-ended the vehicle and left the scene.

Tony Staunton, left, speaks on behalf of his wife, Maria Staunton, center, and son, Graham Staunton, right, Thursday after jurors found Michael Joseph Kramm guilty in the 2002 death of their daughter, Traeacy. Her father said there is no need or excuse for drunken driving.