

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Woman gets more than 6 years for DUI hit-and-run : Judge: Leaving the scene got her an extra five years

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A Santa Barbara County Superior Court judge on Monday handed down a six-year, four-month state prison sentence in the case of Heather Lea Hulsey, 21, who earlier pleaded no contest to manslaughter without gross negligence while driving under the influence, in connection with the July 2006 death of psychiatrist Dr. Ronald Shlensky, who was 71.

Judge Frank Ochoa said five years of Ms. Hulsey's sentence was the result of her admission to the special allegation of fleeing the scene of the crash and not reporting it. Sixteen months of the sentence was for the vehicular manslaughter count.

The courtroom was filled predominantly with the family and friends of the victim and was standing-room only.

Judge Ochoa said he took into consideration Ms. Hulsey's apparent lack of remorse after the accident and the fact that it took a "jail stay to get (her) attention." He said probation was not appropriate in this case, rejecting a plea by Ms. Hulsey's attorney, Deputy Public Defender Mindi Boulet, who asked the judge to allow Ms. Hulsey to remain free on probation so she could help other victims of alcoholism in their recovery.

Ms. Boulet broke down in tears outside the courtroom when greeting the defendant's family.

During the hearing, Deputy District Attorney Arnis Tolks said so many of these cases result in probation sentences and no jail time.

"We seem to accept it (vehicular manslaughter)," Mr. Tolks told the judge. "We can't accept it. There has to be (more) consequences when someone's life is taken so carelessly. Your Honor, I ask you to take this stand."

During the reading of her sentence, Ms. Hulsey broke into tears. On her own behalf, she had read a letter to the family of the victim before the sentencing. In the letter, she described herself as an alcoholic who drank to cover up depression. She said she became suicidal for a year as a result of the accident. She has been sober for nine months now, she told the judge, and said she is not the same person she was then.

The victim's son, Lincoln Shlensky, spoke for the family after the sentencing.

"I am very, very saddened by all of the events," Mr. Shlensky said. "I take no joy in the sentence Ms. Hulsey received.

"And at the same time, justice has been done and this sends an important message to the community that drunken driving will not be tolerated."

During the hearing, the victim's wife, Evelyn Shlensky, told the judge she hopes parents will make every effort to prevent their children from continuing to abuse alcohol and deny them access to their cars if they have alcohol problems.

During the hearing, several of the victim's family and friends described him as an exemplary person.

"(Ron Shlensky) gave so much of himself to so many," said David Echt. "So many have been robbed of his goodness by this tragic death."

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