



Office of the District Attorney

825 Fifth Street, Fourth Floor

Eureka, CA 95501

TEL 707.445.7411

FAX 707.445.7416

districtattorney@co.humboldt.ca.us

Victim Witness Program

712 Fourth Street

Eureka, CA 95501

TEL 707.445.7417

FAX 707.445.7490

Maggie Fleming

District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

September 29, 2015

Joe Jason Serna was sentenced on September 28, 2015 by the Honorable Timothy P. Cissna to serve twelve years in prison after pleading guilty on September 8, 2015, to committing the gross vehicular manslaughter of James Philbrook, and admitting sentencing enhancement allegations of fleeing the scene of the crime and causing bodily injury to Justin Gross, Jacob Southard and Jessica Armstrong. The twelve-year prison term was an agreed upon resolution between Deputy District Attorney Stacey Eads and Mr. Serna, represented by attorneys Ben McLaughlin and Manny Daskal. Members of Mr. Philbrook's family and some of his friends were present in court at the time of the plea, as well as for the sentencing hearing.

The tragic death of 57-year-old life-long Eureka resident Mr. Philbrook occurred on July 8, 2012 when he was on a late-night walk close to his home, crossing 17th Street in a marked pedestrian crosswalk near Myrtle Avenue. Mr. Serna, who was 36 years old at the time, drove southbound on Myrtle Avenue and without signaling suddenly turned his Toyota Land Cruiser directly into the path of an oncoming Honda Civic. The vehicles collided and the Land Cruiser was propelled into the crosswalk, striking Mr. Philbrook and causing his fatal injuries. Investigation by the California Highway Patrol revealed that 80 minutes after the collision Mr. Serna's blood alcohol content was 0.17/0.18 percent, well over twice the legal limit.

The Civic was driven by Justin Gross and also occupied by two passengers, Jessica Armstrong and Jacob Southard. Mr. Gross and his two passengers sustained injuries as a result of the collision. Moments after the collision, Mr. Serna fled from the scene but was chased down, caught and returned to the scene by Mr. Southard and Mr. Gross. Mr. Serna made a second attempt to flee on foot, but again was caught by Mr. Southard, this time with the assistance of an unidentified civilian. Mr. Serna was detained until law enforcement arrived on scene.

District Attorney Maggie Fleming commented on the resolution, "The twelve-year prison sentence imposed holds Mr. Serna accountable for his terrible choice to drive a short distance home while intoxicated. Mr. Serna robbed Mr. Philbrook of many years of life and his choice has traumatically affected Mr. Gross, Mr. Southard, Ms. Armstrong, their family and friends, and all of the loved ones left behind by Mr. Philbrook."