

For Immediate Release

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FIGHTING THEFT, ABUSE AND ADDICTION IN TARRANT COUNTY

This week's felony trials

STATE OF TEXAS V. DONDRE JOHNSON, CDC1

Prosecutors: Sid Mody, Harry White

In a widely followed trial, defendant Dondre Johnson was found guilty this week on two counts of Theft, \$1,500 - \$20,000 for failure to provide proper funeral services through the Johnson Family Mortuary. In the summer of 2014, the owner of the property on which the Mortuary is located visited the location to discuss unpaid rent, at which time a number of bodies in varying states of decay were discovered in the garage and embalming room of the business. Each of the bodies, including the remains of two infants, had been entrusted with Johnson over a period of many months to prepare and arrange for cremation services. Some of the families of the deceased had intentionally been given the ashes from other cremations in an attempt to hide the fact that Johnson was not rendering those services. In at least one case, the remains entrusted to the Mortuary for cremation have yet to be recovered.

"This case was about greed. Mr. Johnson was playing a Ponzi scheme with human flesh," said prosecutor Sid Mody. *"We're happy with the jury's decision, and hope this can bring some type of closure to all the victims in the case."*

Following an almost-two week trial during which Johnson's defense tried to place the blame on multiple other parties, the jury found him guilty on both counts and requested the maximum sentence: two years in State Jail and a \$10,000 fine on each count. The prison terms will be serviced concurrently, and Johnson has no possibility for parole.

STATE OF TEXAS V. ANTONIO MERLO GONZALES, D213

Prosecutors: John Newbern, D.J. Estes

Defendant Antonio Merlo Gonzales pled guilty to the charge of felony DWI, with a prior conviction for Intoxication Manslaughter, and the case proceeded to the punishment hearing, in which prosecutors sought to add the enhancement of a Deadly Weapon finding. In 1999, Gonzales was the driver in a one car DWI accident that killed Veronica Garza, one of Gonzales' passengers. Two additional passengers were hospitalized for serious injuries, while Gonzales was uninjured. Gonzales was subsequently found guilty of Intoxication Manslaughter for this Atascosa County accident, and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

In July 2014, two other Haltom City citizens observed a car operating dangerously and followed to see if the driver was in need of medical aid. The car went through a traffic intersection before jumping a curb and crashing into the bushes. When the other citizen tried to approach, the driver (later identified as Gonzales) attempted to reverse, narrowly missing one of the good Samaritans. Gonzales then drove the car forward haphazardly into a handicapped parking spot in the parking lot of a busy Walgreens location. When police arrived on the scene, Gonzales was passed out at the wheel. Given Gonzales' previous conviction, the maximum sentence for this offense would be another 10 year prison term, however whether or not the Deadly Weapon finding is found true could have a significant impact on the outcome. If the Court finds the Deadly Weapon finding true, probation would not be an option for Gonzales; he would also have to serve at least half of his prison sentence before parole could be considered. If the Court chose to find the Deadly Weapon enhancement not true, Judge Louis Sturns would have the option to sentence Gonzales to probation only and Gonzales would be eligible for parole after serving only one-fourth of his term.

"Antonio Merlo Gonzales has already killed someone in a drinking and driving accident," said ACDA John Newbern. *"He served his time in the penitentiary and then got out and drove drunk again. This type of person doesn't deserve probation. He is clearly a danger to every citizen who drives on our roads and he needs to be behind bars for as long as the law permits."*

Judge Sturns has ordered a Pre-Sentencing Investigation report (PSI), and will make his decision on both the D/W finding and Gonzales' sentence after reviewing the report. Prosecutors have requested Gonzales be given the maximum sentence for this offense.

STATE OF TEXAS V. MICHAEL BOGAN, CDC4

Prosecutors: Marcus Hanna, Brock Groom

Defendant Michael Bogan was found guilty of Possession of a Controlled Substance, 4-200g. On June 4, 2014, Bogan was pulled over for a traffic violation. Upon approaching the car the officer smelled the odor of marijuana and conducted a search of the vehicle. In addition to drug paraphernalia, the defendant was in possession of 10.12g of crack cocaine. Following the jury's verdict, Bogan was sentenced to 7 years in prison.

STATE OF TEXAS V. PAUL SULAK, D372

Prosecutors: Elizabeth Kamber, Tim Rodgers

Defendant Paul Sulak was found guilty on two counts of Inducing the Sexual Performance of a Child, under 14, as well as Indecency by Contact and Indecency by Exposure. Sulak was charged with directing a male and a female relative, each under the age of 6, to engage in sexual behavior toward each other for his gratification. Following the jury's verdict, Sulak was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

"A child should feel safe and protected," said prosecutor Elizabeth Kamber. *"Paul Sulak violated the sense of safety of each of these children, and that is the ultimate breach of trust. I am very proud of the two children who bravely testified in this case, and I am proud of the jury for doing what was right and giving the defendant the punishment that he deserved."*

STATE OF TEXAS V. VANSWAN POLTY, D396

Prosecutors: Nathan Martin, Lucas Allan

Defendant Vanswan Polty was found guilty of Possession of a Controlled Substance, 1-4g. In January of this year, Polty was pulled over for failure to stop at a stop sign. After attempting to run from the officers, a search was conducted, resulting in the discovery that Polty was in possession of 1.178g of crack cocaine. Upon further investigation, several of the passengers in Polty's vehicle were subsequently arrested for outstanding warrants. Polty, a repeat offender, received national notice in 2007 for his involvement in a YouTube video that showed him and a friend encouraging two young boys, ages 2 and 5, to smoke marijuana. Following Polty's guilty verdict in this week's trial, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison by Judge George Gallagher.

Prosecutor Nathan Martin said, *"This offense occurred in the Polytechnic Heights community of Fort Worth. Please consider making a donation or volunteering time at the Boys and Girls Club in the Polytechnic Heights and Stop Six communities of Fort Worth. This great organization teaches children in these communities valuable lessons in both academics and how to make positive lifestyle choices."*

STATE OF TEXAS V. RAYMOND STEVEN MORALES, D432

Prosecutors: Rebecca McIntire, Jim Hudson

Defendant Raymond Steven Morales was found guilty on 10 counts of Sexual Assault of a Child Under 17 and Indecency with a Child by Contact. Morales was charged with the repeated sexual abuse of a young female relative, beginning in 1997 and continuing for several years. The now-adult survivor testified against Morales at the trial, which included lengthy police recordings of Morales discussing details of the abuse.

"The survivor in this case is a very strong woman," said prosecutor Rebecca McIntire. *"She's been to hell and back emotionally and physically, but sought and obtained the intensive counseling that helped her find the strength to face her attacker in court and bring him to justice."*

Following the jury's verdict, Morales was sentenced to the maximum of 20 years in prison on each of the 10 counts, with some of the terms to be served consecutively.

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