

Victims express sympathy for driver in 2010 vehicular manslaughter case

Ex-sailor sentenced to six months after favorable testimony

By **KAREN FLORIN**

Day Staff Writer

Twenty-four-year-old James A. Munsie stood before a New London judge Friday, having pleaded guilty to killing his girlfriend and seriously injuring another man while driving drunk in

Ledyard two years ago.

Afterward, those who had watched all too many sentencing in vehicular manslaughter cases said they had never seen one like this.

Judge Kevin P. McMahon, admitting he was struggling, sent Munsie to prison for six months followed by three years of probation. Sentences are typically longer in drunken-driving fatalities, but the judge had factored in the for-

giving attitude of the victims and their families and Munsie's impeccable life history.

Victim Romina Bascoli's brother, who had flown from Chile for the proceeding, asked the court to spare Munsie from prison. He said his family had liked Munsie and was not seeking vengeance.

Phil Flowers of Norwich, who suffered a broken ankle,

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tibia and fibula as well as a shattered kneecap, torn aorta and blood clots, told the judge Munsie was a good person with a big heart and a kind soul. Flowers said he had looked in Munsie's eyes and seen genuine remorse. He, too, asked the judge to impose a suspended sentence.

Many of the people who stand before him claim to have found God after their crimes were committed, McMahon said. Munsie had always lived a good life, he said, and there was no indication he had a substance abuse problem. Still, the judge said, there is a price to be paid.

"Even a saint, if he goes out and has a couple drinks too many, there's still a penalty," McMahon said. "A good person is dead and another seriously injured."

Munsie was stationed at the Naval Submarine Base as a nuclear electronic technician when he caused the head-

"Even a saint, if he goes out and has a couple drinks too many, there's still a penalty. A good person is dead and another seriously injured."

JUDGE KEVIN P. McMAHON, BEFORE SENTENCING JAMES A. MUNSIE TO SIX MONTHS IN PRISON AND THREE YEARS OF PROBATION FOR VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER

on crash on Route 12 on June 23, 2010. He had no criminal record and had a lifelong history of volunteer work. His family runs a Christian mission for teenagers in Florida.

Munsie had pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter with a motor vehicle, second-degree assault and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. He had a blood-alcohol level of .11 when, with 31-year-old Bascoli in the passenger seat of his Nissa Xterra, he swerved into the northbound travel lane of Route 12 and struck the oncoming pickup truck

Flowers was driving.

Munsie admitted that he and Bascoli had gone to Foxwoods Resort Casino that night and that he had had a few drinks. He told the responding police officers he must have fallen asleep.

Bascoli died a few hours later at Yale-New Haven Hospital of blunt traumatic injuries. Flowers remained in critical condition for weeks and spent months recovering.

At the sentencing, Munsie's family members stood up for him as did the Navy chief he reported to before the crash ended his military career. He

has since been discharged from the service.

Prosecutor Michael E. Kennedy asked the judge to impose a four-year prison sentencing, noting that somebody had died.

Munsie's attorney, Morgan P. Rueckert, said he had hoped for a suspended prison sentence but understood the judge's decision.

Rueckert called it a heart-wrenching case. "The real indication of his character is how the victims responded," he said.

Representatives from Mothers Against Drunk Driving, in court to support the victims, also seemed moved by the circumstances.

"He's had an impeccable life, and he loved her (Bascoli)," said Michelle Lettieri, director of victim services for the state chapter of MADD. "We are the voice of the victims. Whatever the victims want, it's their decision."

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