

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Notice of Sentencing

Woodstock Man to Serve Prison Time for Crash that Killed a Landscape Worker
State vs. Patrick Emerson Thomas

July 26, 2024 – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that on July 24, Senior Superior Court Judge Walter J. Matthews sentenced Patrick Emerson Thomas, 69, of Woodstock, to 15 years, with the first 6 years to serve in prison and the remainder on probation, for homicide by vehicle in the first degree (2 counts), reckless driving, and driving under the influence (less safe, drugs).

Thomas was convicted of these charges following a four-day jury trial that ended with a guilty verdict on June 20.

Charges stem from a fatal crash on November 17, 2020, in the Towne Lake area of Woodstock. That afternoon, Thomas drove his 2018 Ford Mustang through the Eagle Watch subdivision at speeds exceeding the posted speed limit and crashed into Justiniano “Papi” Pirir-Pirir, 59, killing him on impact. Cause of death was massive blunt force traumatic injuries.

Pirir-Pirir was part of a landscape crew working at a home on Eagle Watch Drive. He lived in Acworth and is survived by his wife, children, and grandchildren.

When the crash occurred, Pirir-Pirir was directly behind a large Isuzu landscape truck, which was parked on the right side of the road, with hazard lights flashing. After striking Pirir-Pirir, the Mustang crashed into the truck, pushing it forward and causing the car’s airbags to deploy.

Thomas told Cherokee Sheriff’s Office detectives that he was unable to see the truck because the sun was in his eyes. However, evidence showed the sun was not a factor and Thomas was traveling at least 13 mph over the speed limit at the time.

Thomas was not injured but showed signs of impairment. He admitted to taking a prescription medication, which is known to cause sleepiness and blurred vision. CSO deputies conducted field sobriety tests on scene, and blood drawn hours after the crash showed the medication was still in his system.

The trial took place from June 17-20, ending with a guilty verdict on all charges. Ten witnesses testified for the State, including law enforcement officers, drug recognition and forensics experts, and eyewitnesses. The State also presented more than 100 exhibits, including scene photos and home surveillance video footage showing the crash.

During the sentencing hearing on July 24, two members of the victim’s family provided victim impact statements describing their loss and the impact Pirir-Pirir’s death has had on their family emotionally and financially.

The State argued for a sentence of 15 years, with 8 years to serve in prison. The Defense recommended a sentence of 15 years to serve on house arrest during which Thomas would be prohibited from driving.

Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State, argued that house arrest was not an appropriate sentence due to the horrific facts of this case. Lamb pointed out that just prior to the deadly crash, the defendant aggressively tailgated another driver, to the point that the other driver was so intimidated that she changed course to get away from Thomas.

“Throughout the investigation and prosecution of this case, this defendant claimed it was ‘just’ an accident and showed no remorse for his actions. This was no accident,” said Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb. “Mr. Pirir-Pirir was crushed by the defendant’s car, killed by an aggressive driver who endangered multiple lives as he sped through that neighborhood that day.”

Within minutes of the crash, a school bus approached. Bystanders stopped the bus so that the children did not see the horrific scene.

“Had this defendant not hit Mr. Pirir-Pirir and the landscaping truck, children getting off that school bus would likely have been in serious danger of this defendant,” said Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb. “It may be that this tragedy saved other lives that day.”

Before sentencing the defendant, Judge Matthews commented on the home surveillance video, which showed Pirir-Pirir looking up just a millisecond before Thomas’ vehicle was about to hit him.

Judge Matthews sentenced Thomas to 15 years with the first 6 to serve in prison. He ordered 240 hours of community service, evaluation and treatment for substance abuse, no alcohol and illegal drugs, completion of a MADD Impact Panel and Risk Reduction class, and payment of a \$5,000 fine, in addition to other court costs. Thomas must also surrender his license and is forbidden to drive for the duration of his sentence.

“This defendant acted in complete disregard for the safety of others when he chose to drive impaired, ultimately taking the life of Mr. Pirir-Pirir. This sentence protects our community by ensuring that this defendant cannot legally drive for the next 15 years,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “No sentence can replace the loss of a life. We are hopeful that closure of this case brings some measure of peace to this grieving family.”

The case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb, with the assistance of Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Geoffrey Fogus, Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit.

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The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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