



Sober driver charged in drag-racing crash, death

Jan 8, 2005

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Of The Daily Oakland Press

TROY - A designated driver is the second person charged in the drunken driving death of a young woman.

Steven Michael Schafer, 20, was arraigned Friday on charges of manslaughter with a motor vehicle, a potential 15-year felony.

Schafer, a Wayne State University student, was driving a GMC Jimmy alongside Sandeep N. Sabapathy's Mercury Cougar about 2 a.m. Wednesday, where Livernois Road narrows just north of Long Lake Road. The Cougar slid out of control and rolled several times, resulting in the death of one of the car's passengers.

The pair were drag racing, Troy police said.

Sabapathy was charged Thursday with second-degree murder, which carries a potential life sentence. It is the fourth case recently in which charges have been elevated to second-degree murder.

Despite trying to do the right thing, the young people involved in the drinking party at the home of Sabapathy's parents that night did so much wrong, prosecutors said - including the man who stayed sober to drive.

"The designated driver made a fatal decision, too," Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley said. "This particular person didn't drink a thing and made terrible, terrible choices. It's a needless tragedy."

Schafer posted 10 percent of the \$25,000 bond. Both defendants are due back in court for a preliminary exam before District Judge Dennis Drury on Jan. 20. Both stood mute at their arraignments.

Sabapathy, 19, also posted bond Friday.

Police said the new charges stem from a number of factors that ended with the death of Lindsey Renee Cianciolo, a 20-year-old Michigan State University junior who was studying business and pre-law.

Sabapathy's blood alcohol content was 0.16, or double the legal limit.

Prosecutors say Schafer was grossly negligent. He was speeding, racing with a driver known to be drunk, and the roads were slippery with snow. Those factors combined to make death or serious injury likely.

"(Schafer) was charged because he knew (Sabapathy) was too intoxicated to drive," Carley said.

She said Sabapathy ignored several warnings not to drive.

"There had been quite a bit of discussion about him not driving," she said.

Carley said witnesses reported that the two vehicles had windows down and there was yelling between the two men.

When Schafer's Jimmy pulled ahead of Sabapathy where the road narrows, the Mercury Cougar crossed left of the center line, went out of control and rolled several times. Cianciolo was dead at the scene, and Sabapathy - a pre-med student at MSU - suffered minor injuries.

Those involved were too young to drink, Carley said.

Sabapathy had two passengers, and Schafer had three. After the accident, the passengers in Schafer's car ran from the scene, Carley said.

Troy police Sgt. Robert Kowalski said officers continue to investigate the incident. More charges may yet be leveled, but it has been difficult to work with the people involved.

"The information we're getting changes every day," he said.

The two men charged, as well as the victim, were all graduates of Troy High School, and it appears many at the party were former Troy High School students, police said.

At Troy High School, where the Students Against Drunk Driving chapter is the second-largest group in the school, the case will be discussed by the 80-plus members at Monday's meeting, said Scott Gibbons, social studies teacher and adviser to SADD.

"It's going to be dealt with in our next agenda," he said.

He said SADD is a strong organization at Troy High because of the history of drunken driving deaths affecting the school, going back to Ashley Easterbrook, who was killed by a drunken driver just five days before her graduation.

Staff writer Korie Wilkins contributed to this story.