

PRESS RELEASE

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Harris County District Attorney

KIM OGG

Bartender charged in connection with deadly prom night crash

HOUSTON - The bartender who allegedly served 11 beers to a man before he got behind the wheel of a pick-up truck and killed a teenager on her prom night was arrested Wednesday in connection with the incident, Harris County prosecutors said.

Natalia Ortiz, 25, is charged with serving alcohol to a visibly intoxicated Edin Palacios in May 2016. Palacios is also known as Jose Toledo Lopez.

“Two years and two days after the anniversary of this tragedy, it is prom season again,” Vehicular Crimes Division Chief Sean Teare said. “It is time for everyone to reflect on the responsibilities they have when serving or consuming alcohol.”

The arrest marks the latest prosecution for a new District Attorney’s Office task force that starts its work at crash scenes and traces events backward to find the source of the alcohol.

The Class A Misdemeanor filed on Ortiz carries a penalty of up to a year in jail.

Palacios, 26, was convicted of murder on April 6 and sentenced to 32 years in prison.

While pleading guilty, he admitted to driving drunk and slamming into the Dodge Charger carrying Jocelynn Valero and her prom date.

Valero, 18, died at the scene. Her date was hospitalized and survived.

Ortiz was also charged Wednesday with forgery of a government document, a 3rd Degree felony, for using a Social Security number that belonged to another person.

That crime carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

Investigators at the El Muelle Seafood restaurant, where Ortiz allegedly served Palacios, found documents to verify the forgery.

Teare stressed that that authorities are not targeting the service industry employees who provide alcohol responsibly and legally.

“We are going after the very small percentage of servers and establishments out there who negligently and criminally serve alcohol to drunks or minors,” he said.

Houston Police arrested Ortiz.

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