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December 8, 2018

Man gets 15 years for fatal drunk-driving crash

HOUSTON- A Houston man was sentenced by a jury to 15 years in prison for a drunk-driving crash in which he drove the wrong way on Loop 610 and killed a mother heading home from her own birthday party, Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg announced Saturday.

Daniel Armando Mena, 22, was convicted following a five-day trial in which jurors were told how he topped off a long-day of drinking by leaving the Diablo Loco bar at approximately 2 a.m.

Security cameras at Diablo Loco show Mena mocking make-believe field-sobriety tests, as he stands wobbly by the pool tables.

Mena, whose blood-alcohol content was nearly three times the legal limit when he was arrested, was driving his pick-up truck at 56 mph in the middle lane when he smashed head-on into a sport-utility vehicle driven by Brenda Moreno.

“Brenda should be raising her young sons, not buried by them,” Ogg said. “Daniel Mena chose to drink and drive until he could kill an innocent mother in a wrong way wreck,” Ogg continued. “Society will be safe from him while he serves his 15 years.”

Moreno, 27, was heading home from an office party to celebrate her birthday. While she died at the scene, Mena was uninjured and taken straight to jail.

Her husband, Ignacio Moreno, tearfully testified during the trial in the 338th District Court, how he waited into the early morning hours for his wife to return home.

He ultimately left their boys with her mother and drove along her expected route. He found Bellaire Police at the crash scene.

“The Defendant has no respect for our laws and a complete disregard for human life,” Vehicular Crimes Division prosecutor Courtney Rosen told jurors.

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After jurors found Mena guilty of Intoxication Manslaughter, they were asked to determine his sentence, with a verdict that was returned late Friday afternoon. In addition to 15 years, he was fined \$10,000.

Jurors were told he had a DWI charge pending at the time of the crash, and had tricked authorities so he could keep drinking and driving.

Mena lied by saying he no longer drove the truck, so that he could have a court-ordered ignition interlock device installed on another vehicle, which he did not use. The device requires a motorist to breath into a tube and if alcohol is detected, the motor won't start.

Because jurors determined that Mena's truck was used as a deadly weapon, he will not be eligible for parole until he has served 50 percent of his sentence.

"This tragic loss of a beautiful wife and mother could have and should have been prevented," said prosecutor Lynn Nguyen, who handled the case with Rosen. "Daniel Mena is completely responsible for robbing the Moreno family of Brenda, and I hope he spends every day of his sentence thinking about that."

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