

MEDFORD: TOP CHARGES DROPPED IN FATAL ACCIDENT

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.
Author: LUIS PEREZ
Date: Apr 17, 2008

While top charges were dropped against the man accused of killing her daughter in a car accident, Dawn Nappi drew comfort from the sound of handcuffs clicking around Stephen R. Catalano's wrists again.

"Thank you, Jesus," said Nappi, of Holbrook, breaking a silence in a Riverhead courtroom as Catalano, who was free on \$2,500 bail, was led away.

Outside the courtroom, Nappi added: "That was the best sound I ever heard. He should have been cuffed a long time ago. Eleven suspensions! It's unheard of!" referring to Catalano's driving record.

On Feb. 19, Catalano was in Medford, heading north on County Road 101 in a Jeep just after noon when, near Woodside Avenue, he hit a westbound Saturn in which Angelica Nappi, 14, was a passenger. She died three days later of brain injuries and seven others were injured in all after Catalano hit a second car.

A photograph of Angelica's smiling face was emblazoned on T-shirts worn by members of three generations of her family and supporters, including representatives of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, gathered in Suffolk County Court.

Their relief in seeing Catalano, 38, of West Babylon, taken back into custody was tempered by the dismissal of first-degree vehicular assault charges, dropped because lab reports indicate he was not impaired at the time of the crash.

Catalano still faces up to 1 1/3 to 4 years in state prison, down from the maximum of 2 1/3 to 7 years he faced before.

Still, Supreme Court Justice James C. Hudson ordered a higher bail for Catalano, increasing it from \$2,500 cash to \$75,000 cash or \$200,000 bond, citing his history of failing to make court appearances.

Dressed in a dark suit, Catalano said nothing in court. His attorney, Michael Brown of Central Islip, argued Catalano was not a flight risk.

Brown said later: "My client is extremely upset, but the bottom line is that this was a tragic accident." He said he would order a new accident reconstruction report.

The new indictment charges Catalano with criminally negligent homicide, a felony; three counts of third-degree assault; reckless driving; two counts of second-degree aggravated unlicensed operation; failing to stop at a traffic control device; and two counts of speeding.

Prosecutor Thalia Stavrides said Catalano faces more driving-related violations in Florida, where he also

lives.

Rachel Williams, 19, the Saturn driver; Nappi's sister; and two other girls were injured. One of the two, Brittney Combs, 13, was injured seriously, prosecutors said.

Catalano also struck a Pontiac driven by Giuseppe Lucchese, 54. Lucchese was treated and released for his injuries. Two passengers in Catalano's vehicle, Mark Cutino, 25, and Edward Rohrbach, 53, were injured, Rohrbach seriously, prosecutors said.

Credit: BY LUIS PEREZ. luis.perez@newsday.com