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Man convicted of murder

Twenty-five-year-old faces 15 years to life for a high-speed, hit-and-run, crash that killed one and injured another in 2005.

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PASADENA — A Glendale man was convicted Friday for the 2005 hit-and-run murder of a Burbank teenager and for seriously injuring his passenger while they sat in a parked car on Columbus Avenue in Glendale.

Andranik Atshemyan, 25, faces 15 years to life in prison for the second-degree murder charge and four to nine years for each of the two hit-and-run injury charges.

The verdict in Pasadena Superior Court comes more than two years after Canadian customs officials apprehended Atshemyan as he tried to enter the country three days after fleeing the Nov. 19 crash. It was also the same day 18-year-old Oscar Torres died from injuries sustained in the crash.

"This was a tragedy, completely, all around," said Deputy Dist. Atty. Michael Kraut. "There's no pleasure in a verdict like this."

On Nov. 19 at 9:40 p.m., Atshemyan slammed into Torres' parked Nissan 240SX after driving his Land Rover SUV southbound between 65 and 75 mph on Columbus Avenue near Riverdale Drive, the prosecution said. Before veering into Torres, Atshemyan had sped through three stop signs on the 25-mph street and narrowly missed hitting another car.

Torres' friend, Jason Papricio, also from Burbank, was seriously injured and spent two weeks in a coma. He was 17 at the time.

After the crash, Atshemyan fled the scene on foot and wasn't found until he tried to enter Canada three days later.

Oscar Torres' mother, Martha, said the verdict represented a welcome end to what has been a difficult trial to get through, especially with the two-year anniversary of her son's funeral on Dec. 5.

"It's like the same season, it's painful," she said. "Everything comes back like a flash."

Before the hit-and-run crash, Atshemyan had been cited three times for speeding in Glendale and was found to be at fault for a minor-injury traffic collision, Glendale Police Det. Kevin Hirano said.

His driving record — in addition to his being warned at traffic school about the dangers of his driving habits — prompted the district attorney's office to file the murder charge, Kraut said.

But Atshemyan's attorney, Mark Geragos, said that decision was deeply flawed.

"I'm bitterly disappointed," he said. "I don't believe that constitutes murder."

With no drugs or alcohol involved, Geragos said prosecutors should have given the jury the choice of

vehicular manslaughter.

"It was all or nothing for the jury," he said. "It's an absolute outrage."

Atshemyan is scheduled to be sentenced Feb. 5, but Geragos said he will file a motion for a new trial, possibly staying the hearing.

Just as Atshemyan's case comes to a close, another Glendale hit-and-run murder trial is nearing. Ara Grigoryan, 20, faces similar charges in the hit-and-run death of 24-year-old Elizabeth Sandoval on July 10.

Grigoryan was also caught in a foreign country days after the incident occurred. Mexico City authorities apprehended Grigoryan as he reportedly tried to board a flight to Spain.

Since Grigoryan's preliminary hearing isn't scheduled to take place until Tuesday, Glendale authorities would not comment on the similarities between the two cases.

"There's no way to get around that both these cases are tragedies — lives have been lost," said Glendale Police Lt. Carl Povilaitis, who heads the department's traffic bureau.

Povilaitis said he hoped the public would exercise more caution and realize that breaking traffic laws could put them in the same positions as Atshemyan and Grigoryan.

"This is not something anybody would want to learn from being personally involved," he said.

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