

Driver repentant at sentencing

Tractor-trailer operator caused wreck that killed art teacher on Kansas 7 near 95th Street.

By DAWN BORMANN
The Kansas City Star

Clark Montgomery is headed to prison.

A Johnson County judge ordered him to spend 50 months in prison for killing 84-year-old art teacher Rita Huscher in a June hit-and-run wreck. But when he was sentenced for involuntary manslaughter Tuesday there was more to his plea agreement than just prison.

The judge also ordered Montgomery to write a letter to Huscher's family explaining why he fled the crash scene. Montgomery will have to clarify why his tractor-trailer struck Huscher's minivan from behind. The impact caused her vehicle to strike a pillar in the center median of Kansas 7 near 95th Street.

Huscher's daughter, Joy Edge, and the district attorney's office wanted the statement to be part of any plea deal that Montgomery would receive. Edge thinks it could answer some of the questions that have nagged at her since the crash.

Edge spoke Tuesday at the hearing. She wanted the judge and Montgomery to know that Huscher might have been 84, but her loss was profound.

"I believe that many people, younger people, think that when someone is over a certain age their life isn't worth as much as someone younger," she said. "That person can be a vital contributor to everyone else around them."

Huscher touched hundreds of lives by teaching students, especially older adults and greenhorns, how to paint. She nurtured talents in those ready to take on new challenges, her students have said.

She gave lessons at The Art Shack in De Soto and regularly traveled to Leavenworth, St. Joseph and Laurie, Mo., to teach.

"There was nothing old about her except her age," Edge said.

Montgomery, who was driving with a suspended license, apologized for the crash during his sentencing hearing. At first he awkwardly addressed his apology to the bench of Judge Stephen Tatum. But the judge gently stopped him.

"Tell them," Tatum said, gesturing toward the victim's family.

Montgomery quickly turned around and faced Huscher's family.

"I'm sorry for what happened," he told them.

"Thank you," Edge said.

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