

Teen pleads guilty in tow truck driver's death

By Liz Shepard

TheTimesHerald.com | March 1, 2016

A Fort Gratiot teen pleaded guilty in the death of Preferred Towing's Jason Schultz Tuesday morning.

Trent Sheldon, 18, will be sentenced by Circuit Judge Daniel Kelly for causing a death while operating a vehicle while intoxicated. It is a felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

A sentencing date has not yet been scheduled.

Sheldon answered questions from District Judge Cynthia Platzer quietly after waiving his probable cause hearing Tuesday.

"By having THC in your body by the operation of that vehicle did cause the death of Jason Schultz, how do you plead?" Platzer asked.

"Guilty," Sheldon said.

He also answered questions from his lawyer, Dan Damman, confirming he had consumed marijuana prior to driving his vehicle the morning of Jan. 15, and was involved in the crash on North Road in Clyde Township where 28-year-old Schultz was struck and killed.

Police have said Schultz was working to pull a vehicle out of the west ditch at the time of the crash.

Schultz's tow truck was facing northbound in the southbound lane of North Road with emergency lights activated about 6:30 a.m. Jan. 15, according to the sheriff department.

Sheldon was southbound on North Road when he swerved to the right onto the shoulder to avoid the tow truck, hitting Schultz, the tow cable and stuck vehicle before coming to a rest in the east ditch, according to officials.

Several people filed into the courtroom for the hearing, a few crying during it.

Sheldon's \$250,000 personal recognizance bond was continued, with the conditions he surrender his driver license, submit to drug testing randomly twice a week, and not contact the Schultz family.

Schultz's family declined comment following the hearing. Schultz is survived by his widow, Amanda, and three children younger than 10.

Hundreds of people attended Schultz's funeral Jan. 20, with tow trucks from throughout the state and as far as Indiana and Canada escorting the procession to the cemetery.

While Sheldon was not charged under Michigan's Move Over Law, the state statute requires motorists to move over for stationary emergency vehicles, or slow down and pass with caution if it is not possible to change lanes. The law applies to police, fire, rescue, ambulance and road service vehicles. A driver who violates the Move Over Law is guilty of a misdemeanor and faces four points on their license and fines of about \$150.

Motorists face enhanced penalties of up to 15 years in prison and/or a \$7,500 fine if it causes injury or death to a first responder, according to the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning.

Sheldon's sister, Abigail Sheldon, pleaded guilty to negligent homicide in the Feb. 8, 2010, car crash that killed Tommy Thomas in Kimball Township.

Abigail Sheldon was 17 at the time. She was sentenced to three years probation with her driving privileges suspended, to serve 100 hours of community service and was ordered to undergo counseling.

Thomas, 52, of Kimball Township was driving a SEMCO van through the intersection of Range and Griswold roads in Kimball Township when Abigail Sheldon ran a stop sign.