

## Camp OK'd in teen's death DECISION ANGERS FAMILY OF LOS GATOS STUDENT KILLED IN DRUNKEN-DRIVING ACCIDENT

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Mercury News

In a tiny courtroom overflowing with family, friends and heartache, a judge on Monday sentenced a teenager for the drunken-driving death of a popular Los Gatos High School student to one year in the California Youth Authority followed by 18 months at a wilderness-type rehabilitation camp.

The teen's attorney selected the private youth camp in the Sierra Nevada and convinced a judge that it was a better alternative than locking up the boy in the youth authority for longer, as prosecutors had suggested. The outcome angered the family of 18-year-old Eric Michael Quesada, who was fatally injured in the November wreck that left Los Gatos teens facing their own mortality and organizing a campaign to keep students from driving drunk.

"We were looking for something that was going to send a message that it's not OK to kill somebody," said Quesada's stepfather, Karl Wolski, whose stepson died after catching a ride with a fellow partygoer who slammed his sport-utility vehicle into a pole as the teens scrambled to leave a party broken up by police.

The Mercury News is not identifying the teen driver, who in May pleaded guilty to manslaughter and drunken driving, because he was prosecuted as a juvenile.

Deputy District Attorney David Soares said the boy enjoyed driving recklessly and scaring his passengers, who repeatedly pleaded with him to pull over.

"This was an intentional act," Soares said. "It was intended to terrify them for entertainment."

Two other passengers were injured, one seriously. In the two years before the Nov. 26 wreck, the teen had been arrested five times, mostly for substance abuse. He had recently been released from a drug treatment program but tested positive for drug use shortly before the accident, Soares said.

"This has changed my life as well as a bunch of other people's lives," the teenager told the court in a barely audible voice. "When I close my eyes, I think about it . . . I have the utmost remorse."

The boy has already served seven months in the county's juvenile hall, so he will serve five months in the youth authority before heading to the Blue Mountain Wilderness Program in Calaveras County. He will be on probation until age 21.

A psychiatrist hired by the defendant's family testified that he thought Blue Mountain was a solid treatment program that, according to its Web site, combines schooling and ecologically sustainable living to rehabilitate troubled youths through a science and summer camp experience instead of a boot camp.

Superior Court Judge Ed Davila indicated that he favored an alternative to the youth authority, saying that ``CYA is a venue for California's worst offenders." The boy's parents will pay for the Blue Mountain program, a costly proposition that Quesada's family said suggested he will be housed with upper-class, pampered youths.

In a heart-wrenching letter read by Quesada's uncle that brought many in the courtroom to tears, Quesada's mother, Kathleen Wolski wrote, ``I am forever in jail without my son."

Wolski, Eric's stepfather, described how before their marriage, his wife struggled as a single mother and slept on the couch for four years so her son could have his own room in the one-bedroom apartment the two shared.

The teenager's lawyers declined to call defense witnesses after Soares agreed to the reduced sentence. But they said five witnesses were prepared to testify on behalf of the boy's character and his willingness to help others, including his work as a volunteer.

In the end, the judge acknowledged he was taking a chance on the boy.

``Eric is with you now," Davila said. ``If you fail, you fail Eric's memory. . . . By being a success, you will make his legacy one that is bright and will give his family some measure of closure."