



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
TODD SPITZER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

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Kimberly Edds
Public Information Officer
Office: 714-347-8405, Cell: 714-504-
1917
media@da.ocgov.com

**Repeat Drunk Driver Convicted of Murder
in Street Racing Crash that Killed Innocent Driver**
*Good Samaritans pulled victim out of car as it burst into flames; second
driver charged with vehicular manslaughter, hit-and-run for fleeing scene
of deadly accident*

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A repeat drunk driver has been convicted of murder for crashing into and killing an innocent driver while street racing in Santa Ana in 2020. The driver he is accused of racing has been charged with vehicular manslaughter and hit and run causing permanent injury or death.

Louie Robert Villa, 31, of Santa Ana, was convicted by a jury today of one felony count of murder, one felony count of driving under the influence of alcohol causing great bodily injury, one felony count of driving under the influence of alcohol with a blood alcohol level of greater than .08, and one misdemeanor count of driving on a suspended or revoked license with a prior conviction. The jury also found true one enhancement of great bodily injury. Jurors deadlocked 10-2 on one misdemeanor count of street racing.

Villa faces a maximum sentence of 15 years to life in state prison. He is scheduled to be sentenced on October 7, 2022.

Drivers convicted of driving under the influence in California are required to be given what is known as a Watson advisement that informs them that if they kill someone while driving under the influence they can be charged with murder. Villa acknowledged that he received that advisement after pleading guilty to driving under the influence in 2012.

Ricardo Tolento, 26, of Santa Ana, has been charged with one felony count of vehicular manslaughter with gross negligence while engaging in a street race, one felony hit and run causing permanent injury or death and one misdemeanor count of street racing. He has also been charged with an enhancement of hit and run. Tolento faces a maximum of 11 years in state prison if convicted of all charges. Tolento is scheduled to go to trial later this year.

Villa was driving a BMW on Thursday, July 30, 2020 when he and Tolento began racing next to each other at the intersection of 17th Street and Bristol Street in Santa Ana around 11:40 a.m. Villa was seen pulling ahead of Tolento's Infiniti shortly before crashing into a pickup truck making a left turn onto Santa Clara Avenue at Bristol Street.

The crash caused the truck to roll over and burst into flames. Good Samaritans rushed to the victim's aid and pulled him out of the vehicle. The driver, 67-year-old Gene Harbrecht, of Santa Ana, died at the hospital. Harbrecht was on his way back from lunch when he was killed.

Tolento drove away from the scene of the crash without rendering aid to the victim. He was arrested a short time later by the Santa Ana Police Department. Villa's car was disabled in the crash and he was arrested at the scene.

"Gene Harbrecht didn't have to die. He should still be here on this earth, enjoying Angels baseball, Ducks hockey, and living life with his wife, Patricia," said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. "A repeat drunk driver who had been warned about the dangers of driving under the influence set in motion a fatal chain of events that resulted in a tragedy that never should have happened. Gene's fate was sealed the second those two speeding drivers accelerated off the limit line, leaving a loving wife without her husband and his friends and colleagues in mourning. The Orange County District Attorney's Office will vigorously prosecute illegal street racing and driving under the influence cases to the fullest extent of the law."

In response to a dramatic increase in illegal street racing and street takeovers during the pandemic, Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer partnered with members of the Fast & Furious movie franchise to produce an anti-street racing public service announcement to encourage street racers to keep it on the track and off our streets.

[Download the Orange County District Attorney's Office Anti-street Racing PSA here.](#)

Deputy District Attorney Brian Orue of the Homicide Unit is prosecuting this case.

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