

Fraternity members sentenced in death of Austin teen

Pleas come more than a year after death of Carson Starkey, 18.

By **Tony Plohetski**

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Updated: 11:20 p.m. Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Published: 9:45 p.m. Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Two members of a California fraternity pleaded no contest to hazing charges and were sentenced to jail Tuesday in connection with the death of an Austin teen more than a year ago.

"Hazing is deadly, and we pray the convictions today will send a lasting message that those who haze will be held accountable for their actions," the family of Carson Starkey, an 18-year-old Austin High School graduate, said in a statement after California officials announced the pleas.

Prosecutors said that as part of the agreements, Zacary Westen Ellis, 23, of San Luis Obispo, Calif., will be placed on probation for three years and must serve 120 days in the county jail.

Haithem Muthana Ibrahim, 21, of Lafayette, Calif., also will be placed on probation for three years and serve 45 days in the county jail.

Starkey, who was a freshman at California Polytechnic State University, died in December 2008 after drinking at a fraternity event, officials have said.

He drank to the point of unconsciousness, and an autopsy revealed his blood alcohol level was between 0.39 and 0.48 — five times over the legal driving limit in Texas and the equivalent of surgical anesthesia, according to police reports and a lawsuit filed by his family.

Police reports have said that on Dec. 1, 2008, pledges to the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, including Starkey, were taken off campus and each given a bag containing alcoholic beverages. They were given a time limit of about 90 minutes to finish the alcohol, according to a police report.

After fraternity members later found Starkey unresponsive, they got him into a car intending to take him to a hospital, police said. When he vomited, they turned around, returned home and put him to bed, officials said.

Several hours later, Starkey was taken to Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead, officials said.

Craig Van Rooyen, a San Luis Obispo County deputy district attorney, said Tuesday that prosecutors sought the plea agreements "after carefully evaluating the strength of the case and after consulting extensively with Carson's parents."

"We feel this plea and sentencing, along with the defendants' admission of culpability, will help discourage future similar incidents of hazing," Van Rooyen said in a statement.

Starkey's family, including parents Scott and Julia, said in a separate statement, "Nothing that happened here today will bring Carson back. ... We will continue to devote our lives, in Carson's memory, through whatever steps necessary to change the culture, behavior, rituals and traditions that led to his death."

Cases against two other fraternity members are pending.

Russell Taylor, 22, of Fresno, Calif., is accused of buying the alcohol that Starkey drank. Adam Marszal, 21, of Carmichael, Calif., is accused of taking part in buying the alcohol.

tplohetski@statesman.com; 445-3605

Find this article at:

Print this page Close

<http://www.statesman.com/news/local/fraternity-members-sentenced-in-death-of-austin-teen-735636.html>

