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## Drunken boater who hit pier pleads guilty to manslaughter

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TINA YEE staff photographer

Howard Eddy III arrives at County Court in Rochester on September 16, 2009. (Tina Yee/Democrat and Chronicle/ 091609/ Rochester)

A Greece man admitted today that he was drunk when a new speedboat he was piloting smashed into Summerville Pier in Rochester, killing three passengers and injuring two others.

Howard F. Eddy III pleaded guilty to three counts of second-degree manslaughter and one count of boating while intoxicated in connection with the crash on June 28, 2008.

In exchange for the plea, Eddy, 37, will be imprisoned for four to 12 years. He faced a penalty ranging from probation to a prison term of up to five to 15 years.

Eddy, who was scheduled to go to trial Oct. 5, admitted that he caused the death of Michele L. Ciaccia-Campolieto, 33, of Penfield; Jennifer Lee Leasure, 30, of Brighton; and Cori L. Mitchell, 28, of Rochester; and caused injuries to Earnest E. Edwards III, 31, and Arjon A. Bantum, 29, both of Rochester.

Before Monroe County Court Judge Alex R. Renzi accepted the plea, he confirmed with members of the victims' families, who were in court, that they consented to the plea deal.

Renzi said he had doubts about accepting the plea but decided to go ahead because it would spare the families of the victims from reliving the crash through testimony and graphic photos that would be introduced during the trial.

But he said he felt that even the maximum penalty of five to 15 years in prison wasn't enough. Although Eddy pleaded guilty to three deaths, each of which is punishable by five to 15 years behind bars, the sentences have to run at the same time because the deaths occurred as the result of one act.

"It's hard to believe the fact that...no matter how many people were killed, five to 15 is the maximum," Renzi said.

The judge ordered Eddy to be held in County Jail pending his sentencing Oct. 21, saying that he's concerned that Eddy might try to harm himself. Eddy's lawyer, John S. Speranza, said Eddy is extremely remorseful but there's no indication Eddy is suicidal.

"He is about as sorry as a person could be that this occurred," Speranza said.

Eddy will have to serve at least four years in prison before he's eligible for parole.

He can serve no more than eight years if he's given one-third off the maximum end of his sentence for good behavior.

Although the prosecution and defense met several times with Renzi to discuss the possibility of a plea bargain, the tipping point came when Renzi said he would allow jurors to hear evidence that Eddy's blood-alcohol content was 0.20 percent, Speranza said.

The blood was drawn about 3:15 a.m. — 1 ½ hours after the crash — as Eddy was being treated for severe injuries at Strong Memorial Hospital. Although Speranza said he believed he might have prevailed in an appellate court with an argument that the blood shouldn't be allowed as evidence because it was drawn as part of medical treatment and not under a court order, Eddy agreed not to appeal that point or any other part of his conviction.

Eddy's relatives and members of the victims' families declined to speak outside court. But in brief comments to Renzi, representatives of each family said they approved the plea.

"I agree with the DA's recommendation for four to 12 to save our family from going through the trial," said Richard Leasure, the father of Jennifer Leasure. "It'd be very emotional."

Assistant District Attorney Julie Finocchio said she believed the plea was in the best interests of the families.

"It would have been very painful for them to go through it (a trial)," she said. "They wanted this disposition so it would be done."

Eddy, however, still faces civil lawsuits brought by survivors of some victims.

According to court documents, Eddy had just bought a 23-foot Baja Outlaw speedboat the day of the crash and was drinking at the Pelican's Nest restaurant and marina on the Genesee River in Charlotte when he encountered Edwards, Mitchell and Bantum. Mitchell was Edwards' cousin and Bantum was the fiancé of another of Edwards' cousins.

In a statement to investigators, Edwards said Eddy asked the three whether they wanted to go for a ride in the boat, which was docked in the river behind the restaurant.

They were joined by Ciaccia-Campolieto and Leasure, two stepsisters who went to Pelican's after Leasure attended a bachelorette party for a woman her brother was about to marry. Eddy was Ciaccia-Campolieto's boss at Time Warner Cable and the two women had also been invited to take a ride in the boat.

Edwards said Eddy left the marina with his passengers and headed out into Lake Ontario but was told by one of the women that she didn't want to go out because he had been drinking. Eddy replied, "I can handle this boat," Edwards said, according to court documents.

Once on the lake, Eddy's hat blew off and he turned hard in an attempt to retrieve it. "I then saw we were approaching the pier really fast and I started to yell, 'The pier is coming up.' Howard never slowed down. I closed my eyes and we hit the pier," Edwards told investigators.

Ciaccia-Campolieto, Leasure and Mitchell died at the scene. Eddy was taken to Strong Memorial Hospital, where blood was drawn showing that he was intoxicated. Edwards and Bantum were treated for minor injuries and released.

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Michele L. Ciaccia-Campolieto, 33, of Penfield

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Jennifer Lee Leasure, 30, of Brighton

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Cori L. Mitchell, 28, of Rochester

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2008 file photo

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