



## The Post-Standard

### Man with 7 DWI convictions gets 20-to-life in prison

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The Associated Press

SYRACUSE, N.Y. (AP) — A Syracuse man convicted of driving drunk for a seventh time since 1982 was sentenced Wednesday to 20 years to life in prison by a judge who blasted his "lethal disregard" for others.

"I don't think there is anything I can do to protect the public from you and your conduct except to put you away for a long time," Onondaga County Judge Joseph Fahey said as he sentenced 43-year-old Ronald Daggett.

"It is inconceivable to me that someone involved in a drunk driving fatality could go out and pick up six more drunk driving convictions over the next two decades," Fahey said.

Daggett was convicted in February of riding a motorcycle drunk and impaired by drugs after he nearly collided with a minivan on a Syracuse street in September 2005.

Daggett's first DWI conviction came in 1982 when he was involved in an alcohol-related crash that killed David Goodspeed, 21, of Camillus. Daggett pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter and misdemeanor DWI and was sentenced to one year in the county penitentiary.

He was convicted of driving drunk again in 1987, 1991, 1997 and 1999. Assistant District Attorney Brian Lauri said Wednesday that prosecutors also recently discovered a 1983 misdemeanor DWI conviction, making it seven times Daggett was caught driving drunk. Daggett was also convicted in 1987 of breaking into a liquor store to steal alcohol, Lauri said.

"We are happy the judge imposed a sentence of up to life. It's been a long 25 years," said Tracey Waldron, Goodspeed's sister, who along with other family members said they have followed Daggett's career. Waldron watched Daggett's trial in February.

"If he spent more time in jail 25 years ago when he killed my brother, maybe he wouldn't have been able to get six more DWI convictions. Maybe he would have learned a lesson," said Waldron.

After his sixth DWI conviction in 1999, Fahey warned Daggett that he could face a life sentence if he got into trouble again. He then sent Daggett to prison for two to six years for DWI and aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle. Daggett was released in July 2003 after serving four years.

Fahey sentenced Daggett on Wednesday after ruling that Daggett's 25-year history of driving while intoxicated "manifests a lethal disregard for the safety of others" and qualified him as a persistent offender under the state's three-strikes law.

Fahey told Daggett that he had only himself to blame for his predicament, not the failings of the legal or mental health systems.

The judge also questioned how the state Department of Motor Vehicles could have issued Daggett a driver's license before his most recent incident.

"Whoever that person was should be standing here with you," Fahey said.

Lauri said it was only luck that prevented Daggett from injuring others.

"This time his record screams for action. It is time to say enough, one victim is in an early grave because of Ronald Daggett. We don't have to wait for him to put a second person in one," Lauri said.

Daggett spent time in jail or prison for six of his seven convictions, only to resume drinking and driving upon his release each time, Lauri said.

"This is not an issue of mental illness. The issue is his criminal conduct, and it's that criminal conduct he's being punished for," he said.

Defense attorney Paul Carey opposed Daggett's classification as a persistent offender and said Daggett has been diagnosed with major depression with psychosis.

The repeated arrests for his drinking problem and his inability to stop, even after killing someone, show that Daggett is not a stable, rational person, Carey said.

Daggett was scheduled to be sentenced April 25, but the sentencing was postponed after he attempted suicide in his jail cell. He is continuing to undergo treatment at the state psychiatric center in Marcy.

"He's a very, very sick man. He needs intensive psychiatric treatment, not to be warehoused away in a prison cell for the rest of his life," Carey said.

Carey immediately appealed the sentence.

During a hearing last month, Daggett's mother and an ex-girlfriend testified that he was mentally and emotionally ill and needed to be in a hospital, not a jail.

Daggett's mother, Sandra Reynolds, was consoled by relatives Wednesday as she left the court without comment.

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