

ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

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NEWS RELEASE

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MAYS LANDING – A man was sentenced to eight years in prison today for manslaughter in connection with the November 2008 stabbing death of a Ventnor man, Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel announced.

Juan Carlos Lenis-Montoya, 30, of Ventnor, who entered a guilty plea in March to an Accusation instead of having the case presented to an Atlantic County Grand Jury, must serve 85 percent of the prison term before parole eligibility for the death of Steven Wingard, 47, killed at his 15 South Hillside Avenue residence on Nov. 3, 2008.

During an emotional hearing before Superior Court Judge Albert Garofolo several of Wingard's family members, including his mother Shirley Wingard, attended, some wept. The victim's uncle spoke on behalf of the family. He read a letter written by the victim's mother as she wept in the front row of the Courtroom gallery.

"I wanted so much for him. I am left with his navy jacket. His voice remains on my answering machine. A mother should not have to bury her son," Shirley Wingard said in the letter read by the victim's uncle.

The defendant's family also attended the sentencing.

Montoya's sister said through tears that her brother, who is a Columbian National, worked in the United States to help support his family back home. Other family members also spoke of how the defendant was always law abiding, loving and a hard worker prior to this incident.

Montoya and the victim, who was divorced with a daughter, knew each other because the victim frequented the Nostalgia Room, a restaurant in Ventnor that has since closed. The defendant worked at the establishment as a waiter.

On Nov. 2, 2008 the victim invited Montoya over for drinks after work. The two drank alcohol together. Montoya told police that the victim made inappropriate comments to him and the defendant reacted negatively. At that point Wingard went to the kitchen, got

a knife and stabbed Montoya. Montoya managed to get a hold of the knife and stabbed Wingard multiple times including 13 to the neck and throat.

Ventnor police received a call for a well-being check at Wingard's residence the following night. When they arrived they found Wingard dead on the living room floor. The Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office Major Crimes Unit responded along with Atlantic County Medical Examiner Dr. Hydow Park, who pronounced the victim dead at the scene.

An autopsy was performed and it was determined Wingard died of multiple stab wounds to his neck, which injured both the right and left carotid artery, the right jugular vein, the trachea and esophagus. The cause of death was aspiration of blood in both lungs along with major blood loss.

First Assistant Prosecutor Murray Talasnik told the court Friday that this was a case of manslaughter characterized as passion provocation or imperfect self-defense.

Talasnik stated that in his years representing the prosecution in homicide cases, he has met many victim-survivors and one thing that he has learned is that grief lives on.

"While people die the past doesn't die," he said, adding that like the sea that ebbs and flows, at times the pain for the victim-survivors is greater than at other times, but it is always there.

Talasnik emphasized that it was only after police began to focus on the defendant that he came forward to give a statement.

Montoya was arrested within three days of the discovery of Wingard's body and he was taken to the Atlantic County Justice Facility where he has remained in lieu of bail.

Prior to being sentenced the defendant stood up, turned to the victim's family and apologized for his actions.

"I know you are very upset with me," Montoya said. "Life is very complicated."

Anyone with information involving serious crimes is asked to call the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office at 609-909-7800 or go to the Prosecutor's Office Web site at <http://www.acpo.org/tips.html> and provide information by filling out the form anonymously on the Submit a Tip page. People can also call Crime Stoppers at 609-652-1234 or 1-800-658-8477 (TIPS). Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards for information leading to the arrest and indictment of those who commit crimes in Atlantic County.