

ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

4997 Unami Boulevard, Mays Landing, NJ 08330

Theodore F. L. Housel

Prosecutor

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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2 Page (s)

For further information contact:

Madelaine Vitale 609-909-7855

609-457-7359

MAYS LANDING – A Hammonton man entered a guilty plea today to charges of Aggravated Manslaughter and Driving While Under the Influence for the crash that killed Atlantic County Corrections Officer John Cruz, Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel announced.

Anthony Ruggerio, 31, who has no prior criminal record, will be sentenced in the second-degree range and faces five to 10 years in prison. He must serve 85 percent of the prison term imposed before being eligible for parole. At sentencing, the defendant's license will be suspended for a minimum of five years. In addition he faces fines, community service and, when he is legally allowed to operate a motor vehicle again, an ignition lock must be installed. He will be sentenced on March 19 before Superior Court Judge Albert Garofolo, according to Assistant Prosecutor Curt Baker, who represented the State.

Ruggerio admitted during the plea hearing that on Jan. 14, 2008, he had been drinking and was impaired when he drove his vehicle down South Egg Harbor Road in Hammonton. At 6:12 p.m. he crashed into Cruz' car. The victim, a 51-year-old father of three, had just pulled out of his driveway and was heading west on South Egg Harbor Road when Ruggerio's vehicle rear-ended his vehicle. Upon impact Cruz' vehicle burst into flames and he was trapped inside, Baker stated.

An accident reconstruction found that Ruggerio was traveling over 70 miles-per-hour in a 40 mile-per-hour zone when he slammed into the victim's car. The defendant's blood alcohol content at the time of the crash was determined to be between .27% and .29%, nearly triple the legal limit, Baker stated.

At 6:35 p.m. the Prosecutor's Office Fatal Collision Unit received a call from the Hammonton Police Department and responded to the scene. Officers detected an odor of alcohol on Ruggerio, who suffered minor injuries when his vehicle left the roadway and struck a tree. He was taken to Kessler Memorial Hospital for treatment and he was charged the following day. An Atlantic County Grand Jury indicted Ruggerio in August of 2008, Prosecutor Housel stated.

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) or visit the Crime Stoppers Website at <http://www.crimestoppersatlantic.com/>. Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards for information leading to the arrest and indictment of those who commit crimes in Atlantic County.