

Annapolis man pleads guilty in hit-and-run death of churchgoer, 71

By [Keith L. Alexander](#), Published: May 1, 2013

The Annapolis man charged in a fatal hit-and-run involving an elderly woman leaving a Northeast Washington church in March pleaded guilty Wednesday in D.C. Superior Court to involuntary manslaughter and driving while under the influence.

Prosecutors said Joel R. Bromwell, 32, was driving about 15 mph over the speed limit and had a blood alcohol level above the legal limit when his silver Mercury Mountaineer struck and dragged Ruby Whitfield, 71, who was in a crosswalk after leaving an ushers' meeting at New Samaritan Baptist Church.

Judge Lynn Leibovitz told Bromwell that he faces a maximum of 30 years in prison on the charge of involuntary manslaughter and 180 days and a \$1,000 fine for driving while under the influence. He is scheduled to be sentenced Aug. 30.

Bromwell, who has been in the D.C. jail since his arrest, stood next to his attorney, David Benowitz, as Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward O'Connell outlined the grisly details of the case.

O'Connell said that Bromwell left the Cobalt nightclub about 8:15 p.m. March 21, just moments before Whitfield and two others were about to step into the crosswalk. Bromwell's SUV sped through the crosswalk, at 11th Street and Florida Avenue NE, striking Whitfield and dragging her nearly 100 feet.

The retired cafeteria worker at Sidwell Friends School, where she spent 44 years serving lunch to students before leaving in 2008, died at a hospital half an hour later.

Bromwell never slowed or stopped, O'Connell said. An eyewitness followed Bromwell's vehicle, and when he eventually stopped for a red light, the eyewitness told Bromwell that he had hit someone and should go back. Bromwell drove off. Police said he was wearing ear buds and talking on a cellphone.

Police officers found his vehicle about 10 blocks from the site of the incident — empty, dented and with Whitfield's blood on the wheel wells. It was parked around the corner from the home of an acquaintance of the driver.

Officers approached the residence, where they found the suspect — who, O'Connell said, smelled "like alcohol." His eyes were bloodshot, and his speech was "thick-tongued." Bromwell later failed several field sobriety tests; he jumbled the alphabet on his first two tries. Bromwell's blood alcohol level was measured at 0.11; the legal limit in the District is 0.08.

Bromwell allegedly told the officers that he felt a bump and stopped his vehicle but then panicked and drove off.

As the description of the hit-and-run was read, Whitfield's only child, Tasyha, 43, wiped away tears. Police officers and grief counselors from the U.S. attorney's office comforted her. On the other side of the courtroom, about two rows of Bromwell's family and friends watched the proceedings.

After the hearing, Whitfield's daughter said she was too emotional to comment. "Just hearing all of those details was just too much," she said.

Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/annapolis-man-pleads-guilty-in-fatal-hit-and-run-of-71-year-old-churchgoer/2013/05/01/22f72d6c-b274-11e2-bbf2-a6f9e9d79e19_story.html

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