

Driver in deadly 2017 crash placed on probation



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Nichols Lubbock County Detention Center

Becky Davidson said Thursday that her heart remains broken more than six years after her husband woke her with the news their daughter was killed by a drunken driver in central Lubbock.

Davidson described her daughter, Maggie, as a vibrant and compassionate young woman, artist and humanitarian "whose life of good works was cut short through no fault of her own."

On Thursday, Shani Laine Nichols was placed on 10 years probation after she pleaded guilty to a count of manslaughter in the Feb. 25, 2017, drunken driving crash that killed 30-year-old Maggie Davidson near the intersection of 34th Street and Indiana Avenue.

Muleshoe woman indicted in fatal Central Lubbock T-bone crash

Nichols faced a punishment of two to 20 years in prison.

However, as part of her plea deal with the Lubbock County District Attorney's Office, Nichols will be placed on community supervision, also known as probation, for 10 years after spending about six months of shock jail time at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

She faces up to 10 years in prison if her probation is revoked.



The Lubbock County Courthouse. *Gabriel Monte/A-J Media*

Typically, offenders serve shock jail time at a county jail. However, based on the deal Nichols' attorney, Chuck Lanehart, struck with prosecutors, she had to be sentenced to prison on Thursday.

At the completion of her shock jail time, prosecutors have agreed to support a motion Lanehart plans to file converting her prison time to probation.

Nichols admitted to getting behind the wheel of a silver Mercury Mariner at three times the legal threshold for intoxication, speeding northbound on Indiana Avenue and running the red light at the 34th Street intersection where she collided into the westbound Ford Fiesta that Davidson drove.

A witness told police at the scene he believed Nichols was drunk, saying he saw her move beer bottles from the front of her vehicle to the back seat.

The officer who approached Nichols at the scene reported smelling alcohol on her breath, the warrant states. He also described Nichols' eyes as glassy and her speech as slurred.

Nichols reportedly told the officer she was driving from a friend's house and had been drinking "a lot" of beer. A field sobriety test provided the officer more than enough clues to suspect she was intoxicated, the warrant states.

Nichols had trouble maintaining her balance and the officer observed she had involuntary eye movement often associated with intoxication.

Nichols reportedly consented to a blood draw and a sample was taken to a Texas Department of Public Safety laboratory, the warrant states. Results from the lab showed Nichols' blood alcohol-level of 0.237 percent.

Investigators downloaded data from Nichols' vehicle and learned she was driving about 60 mph five seconds before crashing into Davidson's vehicle. The speed limit on the stretch of 34th Street and Indiana Avenue where the crash happened is listed at 40 mph.

According to a police report, officers arrested Nichols the night of the crash and she was booked into the Lubbock County Detention Center, but she was released without bond pending the filing of charges.

A grand jury returned an indictment against Nichols in June 2017 charging her with manslaughter. A U.S. Marshals Service task force arrested Nichols in Muleshoe.

After Nichols entered her plea, Becky Davidson gave a victim impact statement telling Nichols her actions that night of the crash had left her with debilitating clinical depression.

"Our family celebrations have seemed forced, as if we are simply going through the motions. Our hearts remain broken," she said. "How can we celebrate anything without Maggie and her infectious laughter?"

Davidson told Nichols that her husband, Paul, died last year while still grieving their daughter.

"He died of a broken heart both physically and because Maggie's death left him without the will to fight for his own life," she said.

Since the case is active, prosecutors declined to comment after the hearing.

Lanehart described the case as a tragedy in which both families are forever changed and should serve as a reminder of the consequences of drunken driving.

"It's a good lesson that nothing good happens after midnight on the streets," he said.