

WRONG-WAY DRIVER'S PATH DESCRIBED

BY ANDREW SMITH
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Motorists testified Wednesday that they were stunned one early December morning to see something looming out of the fog and darkness while heading west on Sunrise Highway — oncoming headlights.

The headlights belonged to an Audi driven by Christopher O'Brien, 55, of Sound Beach. He is on trial in Central Islip, charged with second-degree murder and other crimes in the death of Thomas D'Eletto, 57, a project manager going from his home in Aquebogue to work in Nassau County on Dec. 23, 2015.

Keith Van Emmerik testified he was going to work at the Jericho school district in his Ram truck, when all of a sudden the woman in the car next to him slammed on the brakes. She was in the left lane, he said during questioning by Assistant District Attorney Robert Spataro.

"I thought maybe it was a deer in the road, but it was headlights. In my lane," Van Emmerik said.

He tried to move out of the way, but

he couldn't — he said as he veered toward the shoulder, so did the wrong-way driver. Van Emmerik said he ended up half on the grass as the Audi passed him, partially on the shoulder.

Spataro played two 911 calls from motorists who saw the crash between O'Brien and D'Eletto.



O'Brien

"I can't even imagine they survived, it was such a horrible thing," one woman said, crying.

Prosecutors said O'Brien was drunk and high on cocaine when he drove into oncoming traffic on Mill Road and Sills Road in the Medford

area before heading east in the west-bound lanes of Sunrise Highway. The murder charge in a vehicular case is rare. O'Brien has waived his right to a jury and is on trial in front of state Supreme Court Justice Fernando Camacho.

Other motorists who testified did not report apparent targeting as described by Van Emmerik.

John Sharun testified he was commuting from Shirley to his job in Ronkonkoma when he noticed something odd.

"In front of me, there was a vehicle that appeared to have reverse lights on," he said. "But they kept getting closer, so I knew they weren't reverse lights."

He said he veered out of the left lane onto the median, beeping his horn and flashing his lights at the oncoming driver.

"It didn't look like he tracked me," he said during questioning by defense attorney Scott Gross of Hauppauge. "He just stayed in the left lane."

Jeff Hanlon testified that he was heading east to go to work in Riverhead when he saw the Audi going the same way on the other side of the highway. He said he was going 60 mph and tried to catch up to it, but the Audi was going too fast.

Hanlon said he slowed down when the Audi seemed to veer onto the median. The next time he saw it, it had collided with D'Eletto's Toyota.

CRIME&courts

ELMONT

Man, 61, shot during home robbery

A 61-year-old man was in stable condition at a hospital after he was shot once during a home-invasion robbery in Elmont early Wednesday, police said.

Nassau County police said the robbery at the home on S Street was reported at 2:08 a.m.

Police said three adult males, ages 61, 31 and 25, were in the home when an unknown number of suspects, armed with handguns, "forcefully entered" the home through a side door.

It was not clear if the home was targeted.

Police said that the suspects demanded personal property and that, during an ensuing struggle, the 61-year-old was shot. The suspects took jewelry and fled, police said.

Police said details were still emerging and that all aspects of the burglary were under investigation.

Detectives urge anyone with information about the case to call Crime Stoppers at 800-244-8477. All calls will remain confidential.

— JOHN VALENTI

KINGS PARK

Two injured in chain-reaction crash

Two drivers suffered minor injuries in a chain-reaction crash in Kings Park on Wednesday that, as described by police, sounded more like a scene from a demolition derby.

Suffolk County police said the crash began at 10:08 a.m. when a Volkswagen traveling east on Route 25A collided with a tow truck making a left-hand turn out of a parking lot. By the time it ended, police said, the Volkswagen had overturned onto two cars in a parking lot and the tow truck had hit a Toyota going west, then crashed into a parked car — sending that car into yet another parked car.

Police said the driver of the Volkswagen was taken to Stony Brook University Hospital, and the tow truck driver was taken to St. Catherine of Siena Medical Center in Smithtown.

Police did not release the identities of either driver. No one was charged, police said.

— JOHN VALENTI

CENTRAL ISLIP

Mistrial in 2010 stabbing death

A mistrial was declared Wednesday after a juror fell ill while deliberating in the case of a Binghamton man who prosecutors said stabbed another man to death during a dispute in a Central Islip town house in 2010, officials said.

State Supreme Court Justice Timothy Mazzei declared the mistrial after the juror could not continue deliberating in the trial of Christopher James stated a news release from Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota.

Jurors had been deliberating since Oct. 4. When neither James nor his attorney agreed to allow an alternate juror to step in, Mazzei declared the mistrial, in compliance with state law, Spota said.

James, 24, stands charged with second-degree murder in connection with the February 2010 stabbing death of Kevin Pierson, 38, in his apartment at the Park Row Condominium complex on Maple Wing Drive. James was arrested and charged with the crime in April 2016.

His attorney could not be reached for comment.

— ZACHARY R. DOWDY



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