

Driver 'very sorry' for bicyclist's death

Niskayuna teen enters innocent plea

By KATHY PARKER Gazette Reporter

BALLSTON SPA — A Niskayuna teenager pleaded innocent to manslaughter and criminal negligence homicide charges Tuesday in the June death of a bicyclist in Rexford.

Joshua Paniccia, 18, was speeding when his car hit David Ryan, 32, of Niskayuna, on Riverview Road in Rexford, according to investigating police.

Paniccia was arraigned in Saratoga County Court Tuesday afternoon and then released on \$20,000 bond.

After the court proceedings, Paniccia said he was sorry for Ryan's death.

"I feel very bad for what happened and very sorry. I feel terrible for [Ryan's] family," said Paniccia.

His attorney, Charles Wilcox, said the young man voluntarily surrendered his license to police the night of the accident and has not driven since.

Judge Jerry Scarano officially suspended Paniccia's license and told him his bond would be revoked and he would be sent to jail if he drove before a trial in the case is completed.

Assistant District Attorney James Davis said Paniccia had three prior speeding charges against him and a misdemeanor ticket for road racing in Niskayuna.

After the court appearance, Wilcox said Paniccia had never had an accident before June 29 when Ryan was killed.

"This was a terrible accident," said Wilcox. "But, a lot of misinformation is being given out."

He said the trial will provide a different picture of the accident and that, so far, the information that has been revealed to the media has been slanted by "people with an agenda on the road."

He said although Paniccia had been ticketed three times for speeding, he had not been convicted.

"Whether those tickets were valid is in question. Nobody pursued a conviction," he said.

Paniccia was charged in Niskayuna on Sept. 26, 2002, in Colonie on Aug. 21, 2003, and in Schenectady on Nov. 1, 2003.

Police investigating the fatal accident have said evidence indicated Paniccia was driving 90 mph on the winding road when the accident occurred.

Paniccia told the judge he is a full-time student at Hudson Valley Community College.

He is majoring in business administration, according to the college.

Wilcox said the conditions on Riverview Road, where the speed limit is 45 mph, are hazardous for bikers.

"This was a bad accident on a difficult road," said Wilcox. "There are bushes and trees on the edge of the road and all that will come up in due course."

Ryan was a member of the Mohawk Hudson Cycling Club and regularly rode long distances in the evenings after completing his day's work as a scientist for GE Global Research, according to his friends.

Paniccia's court appearance lasted only a few minutes. Several friends of Ryan sat quietly in the back of the courtroom watching.

Fellow GE research scientist Walter Cicha said he was present because he was curious about the judicial process and as a sign of loyalty to a dead friend.

"He was like a brother of sorts to me," said Cicha.

He said Ryan was one of the most safety-conscious bike riders he ever knew and that they had talked about bicycling and bike races many times.

"A week before he died, we talked about the safety of racing and how there is too much pushing and shoving in professional racing," said Cicha.

Paniccia was brought to court by his parents, who did not leave his side. Before the courtroom was opened, he sat in a corner in the lobby and his parents stood in front of him,

shielding him from television and newspaper photographers.

After leaving the courtroom, they stood behind their son as he talked briefly with reporters.



Joshua Paniccia, left, enters Saratoga County Court with his mother for his arraignment on charges in connection with a fatal car and bicycle

HANS PENNINK Gazette Photographer

collision in Clifton Park in June. Paniccia, the driver of a car that police said struck and killed cyclist David Ryan, pleaded innocent to charges.