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CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING: Orangeville Mayor Sandy Brown shakes hands with Santa Claus following Orangeville BJA's annual tree lighting ceremony in front of Town Hall last Friday (Nov. 19) night, which saw performances from two members of Theatre Orangeville, dressed as Frozen characters Elsa and Anna. Well over 100 people attended. The tree was donated by Tina Clare and Ian McSweeney. Turn to A6 for more photos from the tree lighting event.

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Michelle Hanson pleads guilty

Written By **PAULA BROWN**
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Michelle Hanson, a mother who faced charges in relation to the 2018 death of her three-year-old son Kaden Young, has pleaded guilty to criminal negligence causing death.

Hanson appeared in Orangeville court virtually on Tuesday (Nov. 23), alongside her lawyer, Hal Mattson to enter her plea.

Hanson was charged in relation to her son's death after her vehicle was pulled into the Grand River on the early morning hours of Feb. 21, 2018, during a period of heavy flooding which saw river water rise up onto the road. Both Hanson and Kaden escaped the vehicle, but Kaden was pulled out of his mother's arms. His body was later recovered in Belwood Lake on April 21, two months to the day of the incident.

In an agreed statement of facts, read by Crown attorney Danielle Garbaty, the court heard that Hanson had taken Kaden, who was having trouble sleeping, for a drive into Grand Valley where she planned to attend a convenience store. Within minutes of leaving her home, Hanson drove her vehicle around

a road closer barrier on the 10th Line of Amaranth onto a flooded section of the road. Her vehicle was swept into the Grand River.

"She was able to escape the vehicle with Kaden, but lost grip of him as they were swept down the river by the strong current," said Garbaty.

Hanson was pulled from the river by EMS, and was described as showing "slow and odd movements and appeared confused", which are all consistent with symptoms of hypothermia, said Garbaty.

Paramedics attending to her detected an odor of alcohol. Blood samples obtained at the hospital, which were analyzed by the Centre for Forensic Sciences showed Hanson had a blood alcohol concentration of 60 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood.

Oxycodone was also detected, but was noted to be a concentration that has been associated with a "therapeutic range".

Garbaty said a toxicologist was unable to provide an opinion to whether driving would have been impaired at the time.

Mattson, Hanson's lawyer, prior to the reading of the agreed statement of facts requested a minor addendum to change the

word "would" in reference to having seen the road barricade to "should".

Following the reading of agreed statement of facts, Justice Gisele Miller accepted the guilty plea.

Hanson was charged in October of 2018, and was ordered to stand trial on counts of impaired driving causing death and criminal negligence causing death following a preliminary inquiry in 2019. Her trial, which was scheduled to begin in a Guelph courtroom in March of 2021, was delayed due to a hold on jury trials during the pandemic, and the request from her former lawyer, Marco Forte, to be removed as her counsel.

Mattson said his client acknowledged impairment by alcohol caused impaired judgment that caused the incident.

In sentencing, Mattson asked the court to consider that Hanson has been seeing a counselor and provided regular urinalysis test to confirm she is not using illicit drugs.

"I think that would be a great assistance to the court so the court would know that she's on the right track," said Mattson.

Hanson's sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 18, 2022.

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PAULA BROWN PHOTO

CLEARING THE ROAD: The snowplows were out in full force on Monday (January 17) as Orangeville – and much of Southern Ontario – got hit with heavy snowfall from early morning through to the late afternoon. While schools were supposed to open on Monday, the large snowstorm resulted in a Snow Day for students across the region. The Don Valley Parkway and Gardiner Expressway were also closed for several hours on Monday morning due to the extreme snowfall. The blizzard was seen as a once-in-a-decade type of event. Pictured above is a snowplow clearing Bythia Street on Monday morning.

Hanson given two year conditional sentence

Written By PAULA BROWN
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Michelle Hanson, the 38 year-old Amaranth mother who plead guilty to criminal negligence causing death in the 2018 drowning of her three-year-old Kaden Young, has received a two year conditional sentence.

Hanson appear in an Orangeville courtroom via video conference on Tuesday (Jan. 18) for her sentencing hearing.

The courtroom heard on Tuesday that Hanson will serve the first 18 months of her two year conditional sentence under house arrest. She will only be allowed to leave her home for certain exceptions including medical emergencies or appointments, in-person counselling, and employment confirmed and approved by the conditional sentence supervisor. Hanson will be permitted to leave her home each Monday between 12 p.m. and 4 p.m. for 'necessities of life'.

For the last six months of the sentence, Hanson will be able to leave her home, but with a curfew between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

During the two years, Hanson is prohibited from operating a vehicle, with a three year driving probation to take effect following the completion of the conditional sentence.

Hanson will also be required to attend grief and substance abuse counselling over the two year span, and during her one year of probation.

Justice Giselle Miller in sentencing, said Hanson should be given credit for pleading

guilty in her son's death, thereby accepting her responsibility and expressing remorse.

"I understand that it took Ms. Hanson quite some time to come to accept her responsibility in her son's death, but she has done so," said Miller.

Shortly before 1 a.m. on Feb. 21, 2018, Hanson's vehicle was pulled into the Grand River during a period of heavy flooding which saw river water rise up onto the road. Hanson had taken her three-year-old son Kaden, who was having trouble sleeping, for a drive into Grand Valley where she planned to attend a convenience store. Within minutes of leaving her home, Hanson drove her vehicle around a road closed barrier on the 10th Line of Amaranth onto a flooded section of the road, resulting in the vehicle being swept into the river.

Hanson was able to escape the vehicle with Kaden, but lost grip of him as they were pushed down the river by the strong current. She was pulled from the river by EMS.

An agreed statement of facts said paramedics attending to Hanson detected an odor of alcohol and blood samples obtained at the hospital showed a blood alcohol concentration of 60 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood. Oxycodone was also detected, but was noted to be a concentration associated with 'therapeutic range'.

In the weeks following, hundreds of volunteers from the community searched the banks of the Grand River for Kaden's body. On April, 2021, two months to the day of the incident, Kaden's body was recovered in Belwood Lake.

Hanson was charged in October of 2018, and ordered to stand trial on counts of impaired driving causing death and criminal negligence causing death following a preliminary inquiry in 2019.

Hanson plead guilty to criminal negligence causing death in November of 2021, and the charge of impaired driving causing death was dropped as part of the plea deal.

Crown attorney, Danielle Garbaty, submitted four victim impact statements from family members to the court on Tuesday. The only one read allowed into the court was that of Cameron Young – Kaden's father.

Garbaty, on behalf of Kaden's father, read how Young's life had changed after receiving the call about the accident.

"I couldn't just sit back and wait, so for the next 59 days with the help and support of my family, friends and hundreds of volunteer, we continued looking for my son. Those days were exhausting, emotional and physically draining," wrote Young.

Young spoke of receiving the phone call on April, 21, 2018, that a child's body had been found near Belwood Bridge.

"Identifying my son, Kaden's, tiny, lifeless body. That day is something no parent should ever have to do," read Young's statement.

He described having trouble sleeping afterwards, experiencing nightmares and flashbacks of his son's body, specifically every time he is near a bridge or river. He was diagnosed with both anxiety and depression.

Continued on Page A9

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Ontario SPCA shares tips on pet winter safety

Written By PAULA BROWN
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

As winter temperatures plummet, the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society is reminding pet owners to take extra precautions to keep their pets safe during the extreme weather.

“Our furry friends depend on us to look out for their needs,” said Dr. Julia Hughes, Shelter Health & Wellness Veterinarian with the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society. “In cold winter conditions it’s important to consider every part of your pet’s daily routine to ensure they are comfortable and safe at all times.”

To help owners the SPCA has provided a number of tips on winter pet safety, starting with supervising outdoor time.

“Some dogs want to be outside, regardless of the weather. Even if your dog has a thick coat, keep an eye on them when they are outside playing, to watch for early signs that they’re cold such as holding up paws or shivering,” wrote the SPCA in a press release.

Other tips include:

- Modifying outdoor activities – limiting the length of time spent outside and choosing walking routes that loop past your house, in case you or your pet needs to go in to get warm;
- Leaving pets at home – leave your animals at home where they are warm and safe when you’re running errands. Cars cool down quickly and don’t hold in body heat, which can lead to animals suffering from cold stress, hypothermia or frostbite;



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

BUNDLED UP: When it comes to taking walks out in the winter weather, some dogs, especially short-coated breeds, puppies, and elderly dogs may benefit from a dog sweater or coat as an extra layer of warmth, according to the Ontario SPCA.

- Watch for cats seeking warmth under vehicle hoods – knock on the hood of your car or sound the horn before starting the engine. Cats hiding under hoods can be injured or killed by the fan belt;
- Keep paws clean – use a damp towel to wipe your pet’s paws and underside if they’ve walked along salted sidewalks or roads. Salt and other chemicals used to melt snow and ice on roads and sidewalks can irritate and burn your pet’s sensitive paws and can cause illness if ingested;
- Clean up car spills – keep an eye out for antifreeze, or other automotive leaks in your driveway. Antifreeze has a sweet taste that can be attractive to animals and can be fatal if ingested;
- Know your animals unique needs – cats, puppies and short-coated dogs are particularly vulnerable in cold temperatures. Some dogs, especially short-coated breeds, puppies, and elderly dogs may benefit from a dog sweater or coat as an extra layer of warmth.

For more winter pet safety tips, visit the Ontario SPCA website at ontariospca.ca.

Family Transition Place gets \$40,000 donation

Family Transition Place (FTP) recently received a \$40,000 from the Galt Family Foundation, which supports the important service they provide to women and families in need.

Each year, FTP has been able to support hundreds of women and their children through access to the emergency shelter and counselling services.

Like many other agencies serving vulnerable populations, FTP’s services and facilities were adapted rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ongoing support of generous community partners like the Galt Family Foundation will help FTP continue providing safety, support and hope to the Dufferin and Caledon

communities.

“If nothing else, the pandemic has shown us that we need to be prepared for any obstacle,” remarks FTP’s Executive

Director, Norah Kennedy. “This substantial donation from the Galt Family Foundation will help us maintain a high level of service and keep the women and children we serve, safe. These funds will also support our critical programs and

services, which—we are proud to say—have continued—uninterrupted—over the last two years. We owe a lot of that success to tremendous community partners like the Galt Family Foundation. We are tremendously grateful.”

John Galt, president and CEO of Husky Technologies, founded the Galt Family Foundation with his family as a way to give back to the community. When asked why this contribution in support of FTP’s work was so important to him and his family, Mr. Galt replied, “The Galt Family Foundation invests in the communities we live in, with a special emphasis on supporting those who are vulnerable in our society. The last year has placed tremendous burdens on those at risk, affecting both their mental and physical well-being. Family Transition Place has never been more important and we are

pleased to be able to play a small part in helping those in need.”

Continued from FRONT

Hanson given two year conditional sentence

“I wake up every morning and remind myself, Kaden would want me to be happy, us to be happy. He would want me to enjoy life just like we used to before he was so tragically take from me,” wrote Young.

Garbaty noted the three other victim impact statements came from an aunt and both paternal and maternal grandparents, which she said provided a glimpse into the grief the family has experienced.

Hal Mattson, Hanson’s defense lawyer, addressed the victim impacts statements and how they reflected how Hanson also feels.

“We can all imagine how the mother feels, if that’s how other people feel,” said Mattson.

Mattson told the court about Hanson’s rough and unstable upbringing, and how she was involved in relationships that introduced her to drugs. Mattson noted she is working on herself with the goal of staying sober and seeing her kids.

“She would just like people to know that’s she’s not a demon,” said Mattson. “She’s a product of some poor choices...and she made some poor choices, but she’s not a demon.”

It was revealed Hanson had moved to Newfoundland in December of 2020.

Mattson added that Hanson told him she hoped the people who helped search for her son have not ‘hardened their hearts’ because of her actions.

In handing down the sentence, Justice Miller said while a message needs to be sent to deter others she considered Hanson’s guilty plea, which spared those impacted from having to testify, her, her seeking of

counselling for grief and rehabilitation for substance abuse, and the fact she is a first time offender.

“No penalty imposed by this court will ever have the effect of punishing Michelle Hanson more than she has punished herself for her reckless actions, and no doubt will

continue to punish herself for the rest of her life,” said Miller. “No penalty this court could impose will ever bring Kaden back or lesson the anguish felt by those close to him because of his death and it’s circumstances.”

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