



NEWS RELEASE  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAN FOUND GUILTY OF MURDER IN THE SECOND DEGREE FOR THE DEATH OF  
DANA SOWARDS

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Patterson announces that Tommy Morris, 55, of Springfield, Missouri was convicted today by Greene County Presiding Judge Michael Cordonnier of attempted distribution of a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, and murder in the second degree, following a three day bench trial that took place earlier this month.

The evidence at trial was that on April 17, 2019, members of the Springfield Police Department attempted to stop the defendant after they observed the defendant engaged in a drug deal in the Price Cutter parking lot. The defendant then fled from police, driving in an incredibly dangerous manner including driving twice the speed limit in residential neighborhoods and disobeying traffic control devices while the traffic in the area was moderate to heavy. Detectives with the narcotics unit pursued the defendant because they reasonably believed that they had witnessed the defendant strike a pedestrian in the Price Cutter parking lot. After pursuing the defendant for almost three miles, officers momentarily lost the defendant due to his erratic and dangerous driving. At one point, the evidence showed that the defendant was driving 78 miles an hour down Scenic, when the speed limit on Scenic was 35 miles per hour. Seconds after losing sight of him, a detective spotted the defendant driving north on Scenic toward Mount Vernon. That detective then witnessed the defendant run the red light at the intersection of Scenic and Mount Vernon and watched as the defendant crashed into the driver side of the vehicle Dana Sowards was driving. At trial, that detective testified “. . . it was the worse collision I have ever seen as an officer . . . a massive collision.” Dana Sowards, who was driving to pick up her youngest son from her mother’s house, died almost immediately as a result of the catastrophic injuries she sustained during the car crash. The defendant was immediately arrested and was found to be in possession

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of more than 55 grams of methamphetamine packaged for sale, scales, and a drug ledger.

Judge Cordonnier ultimately found the defendant guilty of attempted distribution of a controlled substance as a persistent drug offender, possession with intent to distribute as a persistent drug offender, and murder in the second degree – felony murder. The felony murder statute allows for a defendant to be convicted of murder if the defendant commits a felony or attempts to commit any felony, and, in the perpetration of such felony or in the flight from the perpetration or attempted perpetration of such felony, another person is killed as a result. For purposes of the felony murder statute, it is irrelevant whether the defendant intended to kill another person. The felony murder statute recognizes the inherent danger to the community associated with the commission of a felony or the flight from a felony. Judge Cordonnier reflected that purpose of the felony murder statute in his findings supporting his verdict, writing “[t]he evidence fully supports the conclusion that defendant intended to flee from a felony crime, intended to flee from the police, intended to evade capture, intended to drive dangerously and recklessly, intended to put the public at risk, and intended to run a red traffic signal at a high rate of speed. All of defendant’s intentional conduct resulted in the death of Dana Sowards. Defendant admitted that he put his desire to evade the police above the safety of the public.”

As a result of his convictions and his lengthy criminal history, the defendant is facing a potential life sentence for each conviction. Judge Cordonnier set a sentencing hearing on March 27, 2020 at 1:00PM following a sentencing assessment report to be completed by the Department of Probation and Parole.

**This case is being prosecuted by Assistant Prosecuting Attorneys Stephanie Wan and Dara Lindsay. It was investigated by the Springfield Police Department and Detective Neal McAmis was the lead investigator assigned to the case.**

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