

Redmond man gets prison in fatal car wreck

BY GARRETT ANDREWS

The Bulletin
Over three police interviews, Devin Lee Cooper blamed everyone but himself for causing the 2019 wreck on U.S. Highway 97 that claimed the life of 19-year-old Sara Ann Edwards of Redmond.

He blamed the drivers he said never yield to people from his neighborhood.

He blamed the driver of the concrete truck who struck Edwards' vehicle.

He even blamed Edwards herself, telling police she was "probably putting on makeup" at the time.

But on Wednesday in Deschutes County Circuit Court, Cooper, 43, struck a different tone at his sentencing hearing, tearfully asking Edwards' family for forgiveness.

"I'm sorry for the loss of your daughter. I wish I could give you answers. I wish I could give you your daughter back, and that will never be able to happen. I know how much that must hurt," he said.

Cooper, who had no prior criminal record, pleaded guilty last month to one count of criminally negligent homicide, for which he will serve 18 months with the Department of Corrections, and his driver's license will be revoked for life. Cooper relocated since the crash from Redmond to Island City in Eastern Oregon.

"There are no words that will adequately express the depth of pain from the loss of sweet Sara," said Edwards' mother, Shauna Silveira. "Our family is forever shattered. The brokenness will be with us the rest of our lives."

It was early on the morning of March 21, 2019. The sun was not yet up and it was cold and Highway 97 was slightly wet, though it was not raining, according to Deschutes County Deputy District Attorney Andrew Steiner, who represented the state in the case.

The three drivers involved in the crash were each heading to work. One was Edwards, driving from her home in Redmond to her job as a fashion merchandiser at the Bend J.C. Penney, a position she was "fiercely" proud of, according to her obituary.

Driving a Mack concrete truck in the opposite direction was Michael Cucera, 36. The other driver, Cooper, resided just south of Redmond in the Desert Terrace Mobile Estates on the highway's west side.

Prosecutors said Cooper pulled partially into the southbound slow lane, causing Edwards to swerve to avoid him.

Crash reconstruction analysis shows Edwards swerved left to avoid Cooper, then overcorrected, lost control and went into a fishtail. Her vehicle veered

left, crossing all lanes of traffic.

She was hit head-on by Cucera's truck and died instantly.

"Her car was mangled beyond recognition," Steiner said. "It was draped hundreds of feet."

A witness driving behind Edwards reported to police she was driving close to the 65-mph speed limit at the time. The same witness saw Cooper pull over farther down the highway, then drive off.

Police searched for weeks for the other driver. One week after the crash, officers interviewed residents of Desert Terrace Mobile Estates, including Cooper, who lied about knowing nothing about the wreck, Steiner said. Without being asked, Cooper reportedly said, "You know, the real problem here is that people on this highway don't yield to us when we come out of this neighborhood."

Police were eventually directed to an anonymous comment on the website of a local television station. "I know who did it," a woman wrote.

Police identified the commenter, and it was revealed she was a friend of Cooper's wife.

Cooper and his wife were interviewed by police separately.

"He again emphasized that the problem was people weren't yielding to people from his



Cooper

neighborhood who pulled out," Steiner said. "His story was just demonstrably false."

Five months later, a grand jury charged Cooper with second-degree manslaughter.

Cucera suffered a concussion in the wreck that kept him out of work for a year. The father of three wrote in a victim impact statement that he's haunted by nightmares of the crash and months of counseling have only scratched the surface.

"I see headlights and hear screeching. I do what I can to maintain control of the vehicle after the windshield explodes in my face on impact. I'm trapped in my vehicle and I crawl out and look for the other driver," Cucera wrote. "That's usually the point that I wake up."

Wednesday's hearing was heavily emotional despite the participants appearing by video from separate locations due to COVID-19 protocols.

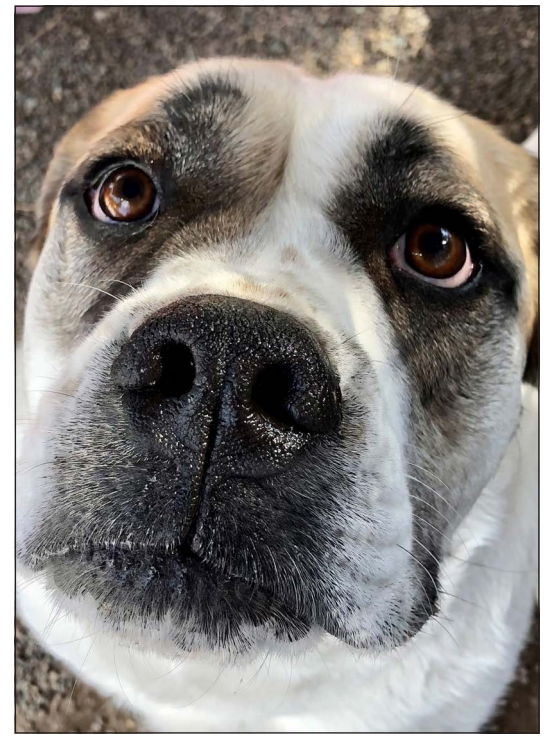
Edwards' parents and two older brothers described the horror they've lived with for the past two years.

Her brother Kyle LaRue asked Cooper to live the rest of his life "for others."

"I'd be lying if I said I've learned to forgive you. I haven't even tried that hard," he said. "I'll be spending the rest of my life trying to not let this rage and grief and despair destroy me."

Reporter: 541-383-0325, gandrews@bendbulletin.com

PET OF THE WEEK



Submitted photo

Bailey

Meet Bailey, a two year old bulldog and Great Pyrenees mix. She was surrendered to the shelter and is looking for a new home. She is a friendly girl but may need some time to warm up to new people. She enjoys attention and is a good walker. Her ideal home is one where she can be the only pet with a person or two to treat her as a queen. For more info, call BrightSide Animal Center at 541-923-0882.

Panthers thump Lava Bears in football matchup

Bulletin staff report

It was a dominant performance in all phases in Redmond's 35-0 win over Bend High in the most recent rendition of Central Oregon's oldest football rivalry Saturday afternoon.

"We felt like we had a good plan going into it, our kids executed it out of this world," said Redmond coach Seth Womack. "I'm proud of them, they did everything we asked of them and then some."

Although only going into the half up 13-0, Womack had a sense his team's offense would break through in the second half. After all, the Panthers racked up over 60 offensive plays in the opening half.

"We wanted to go as fast as we could, we just didn't score," said the second-year Redmond coach. "We did wear them out a little bit and were able to move the ball on them."

The second half, after a Lava Bear turnover, the Panthers pulled away for good.

There was no stopping senior Redmond running back Austin Carter, who finished with 173 yards rushing, 38 receiving yards and three touchdowns. Senior Kole Davis and sophomore Dylan Lee also found the end zone for the Panthers.

"80% of yardage after contact," Womack said of Carter. "He is a different kind of guy"

Although the offense scored 35 points, a simple field goal would have been enough to beat the Lava Bears, who were kept off the scoreboard. Quar-

terback Steve Castillo finished with 89 yards passing while running back RJ Jones led the team with 52 yards rushing.

Without running back Nate Denney — last season's Mountain Valley Conference Offensive Player of the Year and Yale

football commit from a year who transferred to play his senior season in Texas — the Lava Bears struggled to find a rhythm offensively. Gaining only 157 yards of total offense.

But Redmond came up with a solid plan to handle the tricky

Lava Bear offense that is tough to plan for because of the use of backfield motion.

"Coach (Gene) Dale put together a really great defensive game plan," said Womack. "Bend is no picnic to defend."

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