



Natalie St. John/Chinook Observer

Robert 'Tony' Merrill in Pacific County Superior Court.

## Former Long Beach go-kart owner sentenced for drug, gun deals

Merrill gets six years in state prison

By NATALIE ST. JOHN  
Chinook Observer

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — The strange case of drug-and-gun-dealing amusement park owner, erstwhile fugitive and Scientology rehab patient Robert "Tony" Anthony Merrill is almost over.

On Friday, visiting Superior Court Judge James Dixon denied Merrill's request to delay sentencing for a third time, and sentenced him to six years in state prison.

Following spring 2017 raids on his home and his downtown Long Beach go-kart and amusement complex, Merrill was arrested on numerous drug-related charges.

Prosecutor Mark McClain added additional charges after investigators linked him to a stolen gun-peddling ring, ultimately charging him with 49 felonies. Merrill skipped bail and fled to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, where United States marshals eventually captured him.

In April, Merrill pleaded guilty to 10 felony charges, including residential burglary, drug possession, running a drug house, bail jumping, trafficking in stolen property and rendering criminal assistance.

Merrill's parents bailed him out again and sent him to a Church of Scientology-run rehab in the California desert.

His case was further complicated when his attorney was elected Grays Harbor County Superior Court judge and a Pacific County deputy prosecutor who had handled much of his case was appointed Pacific County Superior Court judge.

At the conclusion of his hearing, Merrill, 53, read a statement to the court. He thanked his loved ones and lawyers and a corrections officer and acknowledged the police who busted him were "doing their job," according to a press release from McClain.

Merrill said he felt hopeful that he would be able to turn his life around, and planned to make the most of his time in prison by participating in college, job-training and volunteer programs. Finally, Merrill said some of his closest friends died as a result of their addictions, so he felt lucky to be alive.

McClain was also relieved to see the case nearing its long-awaited conclusion.

"I was thankful that the judge denied yet another continuance in this matter, as we had objected to these delays," McClain said in the press release. "But in the end, having Mr. Merrill off the streets and in prison has made our community safer."

# Petroleum terminal expands to allow more oil trains into Portland

By TONY SCHICK  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

A Portland petroleum terminal is significantly expanding its capacity to unload rail cars, a move that sets the stage to more than double the number of oil trains along the Columbia and Willamette rivers into Oregon's biggest city, Oregon Public Broadcasting has learned.

Zenith Energy, sandwiched between the river and Forest Park in the city's northwest industrial district, began receiving train shipments of crude from Canada's oil sands last year, records show, which it stored in tanks and later pumped onto ocean-going vessels.

Zenith's outpost in Portland now has visible construction underway on a project to build three new rail platforms that will nearly quadruple the site's previous capacity for offloading oil from tank cars, according to building plans filed with Portland in 2014, which the city's Bureau of Development Services confirmed.

When operational, a terminal with such a capacity could handle multiple oil trains per week — a sizable increase over Zenith's 2018 operations. According to Oregon Department of Environmental Quality estimates, the site handled fewer than 30 full oil trains throughout last year.

The site's expansion of crude-by-rail infrastructure comes despite much public resistance in the Northwest for new oil projects. That includes a vote by Portland's City Council in 2016 to oppose any new fossil fuel infrastructure. That same year the Northwest experienced firsthand one of the oil-train mishaps that have occurred across North America as more and more oil has been moved by what critics have dubbed "rolling pipelines" and "bombs trains."

Public records and interviews with state officials indicate those trains would carry a kind of heavy oil that presents a new risk for Northwest communities and rivers, and one the state's



Tony Schick/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Construction at the Zenith Terminals site in northwest Portland.

emergency spill responders say they are ill-equipped to contain if it spills.

"It greatly complicates the spill. It's going to take a lot more money and time and cause a lot more harm to the environment probably," said Scott Smith, who regulates the Zenith terminal's oil spill preparedness as part of the Department of Environmental Quality's emergency response program.

He said the increased oil-by-rail traffic creates a risk in Portland of an environmental disaster like the one in Michigan in 2010, when heavy Canadian oil spilled from a pipeline into the Kalamazoo River. It took more than five years and \$1 billion to clean up.

"It's really among the most challenging spills we have out there, and if it was a large spill, it would cause quite a bit of damage," Smith said.

Zenith declined to comment on how the project would affect its ability to

unload more crude oil, saying only that the project would allow it to fit additional railcars on site and minimize the need to shuffle cars around.

"The multimillion-dollar project will provide an even safer and more efficient operation," Megan Mastal, a public relations representative for Zenith Energy, said in an emailed statement.

The company also declined to say what products it would handle. Mastal disputed that Zenith would be handling what's known as bitumen, which is a type of petroleum extracted from Canada's oil sands. It is thick like peanut butter and often diluted with other petroleum products before it is transported.

"We are not handling bitumen crude through our terminal," Mastal said.

Records show the facility did handle diluted bitumen in 2018, and the Department of Environmental Quality said it anticipates the facility will be handling heavy crude

from Canada's oil sands.

Recent site inspections from the state Department of Transportation found railcars with the placard UN 1267 (Petroleum Crude Oil) on the tracks outside the Zenith facility, and that the cars were from Canada. Photographs of cars at the terminal from earlier this month also show cars with the 1267 placard, along with a placard warning of toxic inhalation.

Five years ago, the site was an asphalt plant in limited operation when a company called Arc Logistics Partners LP, later acquired by Zenith Energy, purchased it and shifted operations to crude. That transition coincided with the North American oil boom and subsequent spike in oil moving by rail. While those shipments have declined since their peak nationally, data from the Energy Information Administration show oil by rail has reached its highest level in three years, driven largely by Canadian oil.

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