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'Pulp Fiction' co-writer gets jail term in fatal car crash

September 30, 2009 | 1:17 pm

Oscar-winning screenwriter Roger Avary has been sentenced to a year in jail for causing a car crash that killed a passenger and injured his wife in Ojai.

The co-author of such hits as "Pulp Fiction" and "Beowulf" last year pleaded not guilty in a Ventura County courthouse to gross vehicular manslaughter while intoxicated and other charges in the Jan. 13, 2008, collision. But in August, he changed his plea to guilty on all counts.

In addition to 365 days in jail, Avary received five years' probation Tuesday, said Michael Lief, who prosecuted the case.

Avary, 44, was at the wheel of a Mercedes sedan that was traveling at more than 100 miles per hour when it crashed into a telephone pole, according to investigators. His blood alcohol level was above the legal limit, Lief said.

Passenger Andreas Zini, 34, was killed in the collision. Avary's wife, Gretchen, was ejected from the vehicle and treated for serious injuries.

Zini and his wife, Maria, both of Italy, were visiting the Avarys on their honeymoon, Lief said.

They had dinner together at a restaurant and were on their way to Avary's house when the crash happened. Maria Zini was in a separate car, he said.

Andreas Zini's parents and his widow traveled from Italy to attend Tuesday's sentencing.

"Roger Avary has destroyed their lives," Lief said.

Avary's attorney, Mark Werksman, said that his client is heartbroken over the Zini family's loss.

"Roger Avary is a decent man and a good man who has always strived to do the right thing in his life," Werksman said. "He never meant any harm to anyone, and this was just a terrible accident."

Although Avary initially disputed prosecutors' contention that he was drunk, Werksman said his client changed his plea in an attempt to bring the matter to a resolution.

"He wanted to be able to get on with his life and allow the Zinis to get on with theirs by bringing some closure to this case," he said.

The court was informed during Tuesday's hearing that Avary had reached a settlement with the Zini family in a civil suit for \$4.1 million.

Avary and co-writer Quentin Tarantino won an Academy Award in 1994 for "Pulp Fiction." Avary also co-wrote the screenplay for 2007's fantasy hit "Beowulf."

—Alexandra Zavis

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