

DUI mom sentenced to 7-plus

Fatal crash victims' father expresses sorrow for defendant

murder *3.12.02*
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SANTA CRUZ — In a standing-room-only courtroom overflowing with friends, family and grief, a judge sentenced a Santa Cruz mother who killed two teens in a traffic crash last year to more than seven years in state prison.

Lisa Tegenkamp-Cotter, 35, will serve up to seven years and eight months for gross vehicular manslaughter. On Sept. 22, Tegenkamp-Cotter's Suburban crashed into a van, killing Amanda Wagner, 16, and Carrie Wagner, 14, who were returning from the Beachfest Christian rock concert at Main Beach.



TEGENKAMP-COTTER

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DAN WAGNER, WHOSE TEEN DAUGHTERS, AMANDA AND CARRIE, WERE KILLED IN CRASH

Prosecutor Toni Allen said Tegenkamp-Cotter had a blood-alcohol level of .17 and had admitted to snorting a line of cocaine before picking up her two children from a nearby day care. She had driven just three blocks when she ran a stop sign and crashed into the Wagners' van.

"There is no satisfaction and no joy in seeing her go away to prison," said the girls' father, Dan Wagner, after the sentencing. "I feel just as bad for her that she has to go away."

Tegenkamp-Cotter had been at a wedding dance with her husband, Todd Cotter, before the accident. He had dropped her off to pick up their children, ages 2 and 3. She crashed at the intersection of Cayuga and Windsor streets in the Seabright area. Amanda and Carrie Wagner died at the scene. Tegenkamp-Cotter's children were not injured.

"Lisa Cotter made the choice to break the law," said Steve Layman, a Wagner family friend. "This was not an accident."

Dan Wagner said he and his wife, Lynn Wagner, are trying to deal with the loss of their only children, and they are recovering from physical injuries, including dizziness, and back and hip injuries, stemming from the crash.

During the sentencing, the courtroom was filled with friends of the Wagner girls, members of their church, Light-house Christian Fellowship in Soquel, and members of Tegenkamp-Cotter's family, including her husband, Todd Cotter, her previous husband and her sister.

The sound of crying came from all directions and many of the speakers before Judge Michael Barton sobbed so deeply their words were barely audible.

"When she died a part of me died, too, that can never be replaced," said Danielle Schlotterbeck of her friend Amanda Wagner.

In an emotional moment, Allen tried to force Tegenkamp-Cotter to look at pictures of the devastation from the accident and of the Wagner girls, but the defendant turned

Please see **SENTENCE** on **BACK PAGE**

Sentence

Continued from Page A1

away in tears.

Tegenkamp-Cotter took the podium to apologize to the Wagner family and say that she has acknowledged her drinking and drug problems and is undergoing counseling.

"I'm sorry for the pain I've caused for so many people," she said. "I owe the souls of Mandy and Carrie Wagner a debt to raise my own children the best I can. Please take into consideration how much my children need me."

Her attorney, William Minkner, asked the judge to give his client a lengthy sentence in jail, rather than prison, followed by a residential treatment program.

"Let her have the chance to prove further to the court and everyone here that she can be a productive wonderful member of society," Minkner said. "She is worth the chance."

Allen said that because of sentencing rules, Tegenkamp-Cotter will probably do about six years and four months before she becomes eligible for parole.



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Lisa Tegenkamp-Cotter sobs as the courtroom is cleared following her sentencing Monday.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel