Man cleared in EHT teen's death on bike

William Simkins Jr. still faces prison for leaving the scene of the crash.

By LYNDA COHEN
Staff Writer

MAYS LANDING — William Simkins Jr. was acquitted Wednesday of vehicular homicide in the crash that killed an Egg Harbor Township teen in 2010. But a guilty verdict for leaving the scene of a fatal accident was enough to send him to jail immediately.

"I need to stand," Mimi Broschard cried as she made sure she had a clear view of the man who killed her 16-year-old son being handcuffed and led out of court.

Superior Court Judge Michael Donio revoked Simkins' bail at the request of acting First Assistant Prosecutor Diane Ruberton, who pointed out the man faces prison time when he is sentenced Oct. 12. He faces a likely sentence of five to 10 years in prison for the second-degree crime.

Simkins, 33, of Egg Harbor Township, was accused of chasing down three teens at about 2 a.m. Sept. 6, 2010, after one kicked the mirror of his mother's parked car. Jacob Broschard, 16, was struck and killed as he biked down Jerome Avenue in the township.

Simkins fled the scene, turning himself in to police more than two hours later.

Defense attorney Lou Barbone argued there was no evidence Simkins chased the teens and that the man was simply heading to Cumberland Farms when Broschard veered into his path.

The judge added hours to "Not guilty" the vehicular homicide.

Severa, who had room in the vehicle when the crying started.

After the trial, Simkins' lawyer said they were happy with the decision.

□ See Simkins
Volunteers form a line to move bags of young oysters from beds at the Rutgers Cape Shore lab on the Delaware Bay in Middle Township to a barge that will transplant them in bay waters off of Cumberland County.

Volunteers, clam shells help rebuild numbers

By JOEL LANDAU
Staff Writer

MIDDLE TOWNSHIP — On a recent morning, two dozen volunteers, soon to be covered in mud, arrived at the Rutgers Cape Shore lab on the Delaware Bay to transport beds of young oysters upstream to waters off Cumberland County, where they will grow, be harvested and make it to market.

Oysters have been ravaged by disease and lack of habitat in the bay for decades, and recent cuts in federal funding have hampered efforts to stem their declining numbers. Last year, rain from Tropical Storms Lee and Irene were extremely harmful, killing nearly 80 percent of the oysters in some portions of the bay.

But still the oysters survive, in part because of efforts such as the one taking place here, where Rutgers University and the American Littoral Society have grown a few million baby oysters a year through an educational project it runs with local schools.

The key to the oysters' survival is empty clam shells.

Lisa Calvo, project coordinator and visiting scientist with the Haskin Shellfish Research

See Oysters, A7

Staff Sgt. Sean Bovee, of Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, carries bags of oysters for the transplanting effort.
Laboratory at Rutgers, said every year a group of volunteers will collect shells from processing plants, clean the shells and let them dry, put them in bags and place them into the water in June. The oysters spawn late into summer. The larvae float for a few weeks and then need to attach to a habitat in order to grow. Once attached to a shell and collected, the baby oysters, or spat, are transported to the Candy’s Beach Oyster Restoration Enhancement Area in the Delaware Bay near the Cohansey River, where they will be protected from fishing.

In the first few weeks, the spat is about the size of a dot of sand, but after a few months they grow into the size of a coin, Calvo said. The bags of shells will have multiple small oysters and will be placed into a conservation area, she said. After about a year they will be able to detach from the shells and live on their own, she said.

The environmental groups began their project in 2007, and 20 million oyster spat have since settled on the shells, Calvo said. The enhancement area is about 10 total acres, and in past years the groups have filled 3 acres, she said. This year they started placing the baby oysters in the next 2 acres, she said.

“There was nothing there and now it’s a building oyster population,” she said.

The groups usually involve schools and use the project to educate elementary and middle school students in the area, she said.

“The big thing is the educational aspect — the need to restore shells and conserve the habitat,” she said. “It provides a real-world experience to learn about oysters.”

The state also launched its own program with the oyster industry and environmental groups in July to help the oysters.

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DEP spokesman Larry Hanja said tropical storms last year increased the amount of fresh water in the bay, which is harmful to the oysters.

But the state planted more than 2,000 cubic yards of clam shells in the lower bay off Cape May County’s Pierce’s Point. As the larvae connect to the shells they will be transported to an area near Salem County’s Hope Creek where they will be safer from predators and disease. They will then return to this part of the bay.

Bill Shadel, habitat restoration program director for the Littoral Society, said the region’s native species, the Eastern Oyster, is important for the local ecosystem, because oysters filter out a lot of contaminants and pollutants in the water and attract a lot of fish.

Shadel said he hopes that as oysters survive the diseases and reproduce they will become more resistant to the diseases.

Dennis Township resident Bob Keogh, owner of Bayshore Oysters in Cape May, said oysters help filter the water.

Keogh said he supports the work to try to grow the local industry.

“We need more people to grow oysters to make it more sustainable,” he said. “Right now, local farmers are only sustaining a small part of the marketplace.”

Oysters harvested in the Delaware Bay generate nearly $3.5 million for local oystermen and pump about $20 million into the Delaware Bay region’s economy, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Steve Fleetwood, manager of Bivalve Packing Co. in Port Norris, said the industry was much better in the 1970s and 1980s, until diseases came to the region. In 1986, the disease MSX severely hurt the oyster population, he said. By 1991 the population had rebounded, but it was wiped out again the following year when another disease, Dermo, affected the area.

Management plans were created in 1995 that included quotas for how many oysters the businesses could take out of the water, he said.

There are about 80 oyster-fishing licenses in the area, Fleetwood said, and the oysters are sold both locally and nationwide.

In 2005 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began a program to help regrow the oyster population.

Richard Pearsall, spokesman for the Army Corps, said the organization dropped 1.8 million bushels of clam shells into the Delaware Bay annually from 2005 to 2008, when the project’s $5 million budget ran out. The program was successful because the oyster larvae needed a habitat in the water to attach to in order to grow.

Despite the loss of funding, the program has continued, with the oyster larvae attaching to the shells and growing into oysters that will contribute to the local ecosystem.