Defendant(s): Charles and Kimberly Matthews

Victim(s): Not specified in this context

Court Decision: The Matthews were found not guilty on charges of providing alcohol to minors at a wedding event. Their son, Thomas Matthews, pled guilty to underage purchase of alcohol and received a sentence including probation and community service.

Case Facts:

A Raleigh couple charged with supplying alcohol to minors at a June 2014 wedding has been found not guilty.

Dr. Charles and Kimberly Matthews were acquitted Friday on four counts each of aiding and abetting the consumption of alcohol by minors.

Jurors in Wake County Superior Court spent a total of about two hours deliberating on Thursday and Friday. On Friday morning, jurors spent about an hour examining 30 time-stamped photos from the wedding as well as copies of text messages. They were required to view the evidence in the courtroom at the request of defense attorney, Hart Miles.

The couple’s son, Thomas Matthews, 19, who pleaded guilty to underage purchase of alcohol on Monday, was sentenced following the verdict in his parent’s case to 45 days in jail suspended, 18 months of unsupervised probation as well as 40 hours of community service. He must also surrender his driver’s license and will remain on probation until he is 21.

Prior to sentencing, Thomas Matthews’ attorney asked the judge to consider his clients' age, academic achievement, volunteer work and lack of prior convictions in the decision.

After leaving a wedding at the Matthewses home, Jonathan “JT” Taylor, 18, died in a drunken driving crash. The couple is still facing a civil lawsuit filed against them by Taylor’s family.

“JT will always be a memory for me. He will always stay with me, physically on my body and in my heart,” said Thomas Matthews prior to sentencing.

Speaking to the judge Friday afternoon, Thomas Matthews said that, due to his intoxicated state, he could not recall with confidence why Taylor decided to get behind the wheel that night. He also stated that he could not remember the last time he saw or spoke with Taylor.

“Thomas and JT Taylor were best friends and he loved him like a brother. He always will,” said Smith.

Superior Court Judge Osmond Smith said prior to sentencing that the case was not about compensating the Taylor family for the loss of their son but about responsibility. As he spoke, Taylor’s mother wiped away tears.

“There’s nothing the court can do here to bring JT back to the Earth to his parents,” said Osmond Smith. “There’s nothing to repair or remove the heartache that they have. Nothing will remove the feeling they likely have every morning when they wake up that the loss of their son is still there, it’s real, it’s permanent.”

The Taylor family issued the following statement through their attorney, Landon White, after the verdicts:

"Providing alcohol to underage persons is a serious issue and against the law. Such laws are in place to minimize the risk of tragedies such as the death of J.T. The Taylors are disappointed with the outcome, but respect due process and the jury’s decision. Despite the outcome, this case should create awareness that it is not okay to provide alcohol to underage persons, much less for adults and parents to provide alcohol to underage persons. If one life can be saved from awareness of this issue, the loss of J.T. will not be in vain. The Taylors would like to thank Jason Waller and others with the Wake County District Attorney’s Office who sought justice for J.T."

Deliberation on the case against the Matthewses began late Thursday afternoon, after closing statements from both attorneys.

In his closing arguments, Miles pointed out that it is legal to serve alcohol in a home and that there was no indication that the couple told bartenders at the event to serve alcohol to minors. In addition, Hart said it was the responsibility of the bartenders to check identification before serving alcohol.

He also noted that, in many respects, 18-year-olds are considered young adults and questioned whether parents should be held responsible for their decisions.

He said in looking through 4,000 photos from the event, police did not find a picture that showed the couple alongside teenagers with wine.

"I submit to you they are not criminals, and they should not be held criminally accountable for what happened," he said.

The parents tried unsuccessfully to get their case dismissed, claiming they were unfairly discriminated against by the Wake County District Attorney's Office because neither the bartenders nor the person who sold their son the alcohol were charged.

Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman said Friday she believed there was enough evidence to take the case to trial, and she respects the jury's decision.

"We lose way too many young people as a result of underage drinking. Too many lives are cut short," she said. "If we've managed to highlight an issue and prevent one person from losing their life, it will have been worth it."

Miles said his clients "take no joy" in their acquittal and that will always think about Taylor.

"If they had any idea JT was going to drive, of course they would have intervened," he said. "It's a tragedy."

Miles also said the couple is thankful the emotionally charged case is over.

"The Matthewses have been publicly accused and ridiculed, and now a jury has told them they're not guilty. Hopefully, this will bring some measure of closure," he said.

Juror Timothy Monroe said when deliberations started, most jurors agreed on the final verdict.

He said jurors "could not be sure the Matthewses knew the minors were drinking," and they had to be sure beyond a reasonable doubt.

Monroe said jurors looked at numerous pictures from the wedding, and none showed the couple interacting with the minors.