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## [Passenger in vehicle involved in fatal Darien hit-and-run accident testifies in Serrano trial](#)

posted by Lauren Leone

Attorneys spent more than an hour hashing out details this afternoon with Candace Gilden about the moments before, during and after she rode with an alleged drunk driver the night of a hit-and-run accident in Darien that killed 18-year-old Connor Lynskey last August.

Passenger Gilden, driver Jennifer Serrano and pedestrian Lynskey had all departed a Jason Aldean concert on Aug. 10 at Darien Lake Performing Arts Center intending to safely to go to their destinations.

Gilden, a 41-year-old former Derby resident, was a passenger in her friend Serrano's Jeep Wrangler when Serrano unknowingly struck Lynskey on Sumner Road.

New evidence came to light in Genesee County Court today as Gilden was called upon by District Attorney Lawrence Friedman to recount her perception of that fateful night during direct examination.

She said that earlier in the afternoon of Aug. 10, she and Serrano, a 48-year-old resident of Irving, met up and consumed one alcoholic beverage each prior to purchasing more alcohol at Tops Friendly Market in Derby.

Serrano and Gilden packed coolers containing the beverages and traveled to a friend's house on Route 77 near Darien Lake. There, they continued to drink as they set up a tent outside to sleep in after the concert.

The women drank in the Darien Lake parking lot, throughout the Aldean performance, and at an on-site after-party. Gilden testified that Serrano was behaving normally as they consumed alcohol.

As the women walked to Serrano's vehicle, Serrano insisted that she was OK to drive back to the friend's house on Route 77. In the midst of traffic after the concert, and having a lack of familiarity with the area, the women became lost while driving down Sumner Road.

Gilden said she attempted to find their location on Google Maps and, therefore, was focused on her phone screen as Serrano drove on the dark road.

Serrano reportedly turned around on Sumner Road in order to drive in the direction of Route 77. Gilden noticed that a crack in the windshield had formed and the right exterior rearview mirror had been pushed toward the passenger door. Gilden maintained she did not see, hear or feel anything that could have caused the damage throughout her testimony.

Gilden then asked Serrano what had happened, and, after getting no answer, turned down the loud music that was playing and asked again. Serrano responded that they needed to drive to her friend's house.

The women continued driving without stopping to check the damage to the vehicle.

About 30 minutes later, Deputy Robert Henning pulled over Serrano after a near collision with his patrol vehicle and charged her with drunk driving when she reportedly failed field sobriety tests. Gilden later posted Serrano's \$1,000 bail at Genesee County Jail.

After refueling her Jeep at a gas station on Route 77, Serrano allegedly drove her vehicle without a driver's license, which had just been revoked by the police due to her performance on the sobriety tests.

The women returned to the area surrounding Sumner Road on Aug. 11 in an attempt to find where the vehicle sustained damage with little success.

Gilden testified that she felt physically ill that evening when she received news that Lynskey, of Hinckley, had been killed on Sumner Road in the early hours of Aug. 11. Gilden described the surprised expression on Serrano's face upon relaying the information to her.

On Aug. 12, Gilden gave a statement to Genesee County Sheriff's deputies about her understanding of the situation. Serrano was charged with vehicular manslaughter, leaving the scene of an accident without reporting it, driving while intoxicated, and aggravated unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle.

On cross examination, defense attorney Frank LoTempio debated whether jurors should trust Gilden's interpretation of Serrano's behavior and actions as well as the accident because Gilden admitted she was impaired by alcohol on Aug. 10 and 11.

Gilden also maintained that her attention was diverted to her phone at the time of the collision, so LoTempio argued it is difficult for her to know if Serrano drove in an erratic manner.

LoTempio fired a crucial line of questioning at Gilden about whether the vehicle struck something or if something hit the vehicle on Sumner Road. This argument — that Lynskey may have tripped into Serrano's vehicle due to the poorly lit road and his 0.16 blood alcohol content — is the question that defense counsel also begs of jurors.

The trial will draw nearer to that answer at 1 p.m. Wednesday in Genesee County Court.