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Houston businessman guilty of harboring cop killer

By MARY FLOOD and SUSAN CARROLL Copyright 2009

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Landscape business owner Robert Lane Camp pleaded guilty Monday to harboring an illegal immigrant who murdered a Houston police officer.

“It was very difficult to just see his face,” said Houston police Sgt. Joslyn Johnson, the widow of Officer Rodney Johnson. “I felt somewhat vindicated and somewhat disappointed as well.”

Camp, 48, pleaded guilty to employing and harboring Leonardo Quintero, the Mexican national convicted of shooting Rodney Johnson four times in the head after a traffic stop in 2006.

Quintero was sentenced in May to life in prison.

Camp faces up to five years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine, but prosecutors Jay Hileman and Ryan McConnell asked in a plea bargain that he be sentenced to three months in prison, three months home confinement and five years probation.

U.S. District Judge Vanessa Gilmore does not have to follow the recommendation when she sentences Camp.

On Sept. 21, 2006, Rodney Johnson stopped a truck owned by Camp's company for a traffic violation and arrested Quintero after the landscape worker could not provide a driver's license. As the officer wrote his report in the front seat of his police car, Quintero, in the back seat, pulled a pistol overlooked in a body search and shot Johnson four times in the head.

Joslyn Johnson, who has sued Camp in civil court, was in federal court Monday and said she was happy to see Camp admit guilt but would like to see a harsh punishment.

She stressed that Camp transported and housed her husband's killer, knew he carried a gun and had it not been for Camp, her husband would be alive.

“He's kind of getting off lightly considering the consequences of his actions,” she said.

Court records show that Camp went to considerable lengths to help Quintero and keep him on the job at his Deer Park company.

In 1998, Camp posted bond and hired an attorney for Quintero after he was jailed on an indecency with a child charge. After the worker was deported in 1999, Camp sent him money in Mexico and bought him a plane ticket from Phoenix to Houston after Quintero re-entered through Arizona illegally, according to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent affidavit. Camp also rented a house to Quintero.

J.J. Berry, a senior HPD officer who served on a union board with Rodney Johnson, said after court that he hopes Camp's case is a warning to other employers who harbor illegal immigrants.

Immigration lawyer Gordon Quan said this is an unusual case but still should be noted by others who employ undocumented workers.

“My feeling is that they'll throw the kitchen sink at you,” Quan said.

University of Houston professor Michael A. Olivas said that this harboring case was unique because of its tragic result and because of the extraordinary measures Camp took to help an employee stay in the country. He said he doubts the case will significantly affect employers' hiring practices.