



Man pleads guilty in fatal accident

By Kerry Tesoriero
Staff Writer

A Stamford driver whose catering truck backed into and killed an elderly woman in the Cove last year pleaded guilty yesterday to related charges.

Elefrios Koutinas, 30, of 65 Van Buskirk Ave., faces up to three months in prison for the conviction.

Carmen Salazar-Rueda, 79, who used a cane to walk, was trying to cross Shippan Avenue on July 2, 1999, when the truck Koutinas was driving backed up and rolled over her, witnesses told police, according to an arrest warrant.

Koutinas continued to roll backward over Salazar-Rueda until a screaming witness pounded on the truck's window,

according to the warrant.

The woman was trapped under the truck until firefighters were able to get her out. She died about four hours later.

A medical examiner found her cause of death to be multiple blunt force injuries.

Koutinas pleaded guilty in state Superior Court to negligent homicide with a motor vehicle and operating with a suspended license.

At his sentencing, slated for Nov. 16, a judge could give Koutinas up to nine months in prison, suspended after he serves three, followed by three months of probation. Koutinas' attorney, John Thygerson of Norwalk, may argue for a lighter sentence.

The maximum penalty for negligent homicide is six months

in prison, a \$1,000 fine and five points on a driver's license.

Thygerson said yesterday he intends to ask the judge to consider a sentence that forgoes prison.

"This is the textbook definition of a tragic accident," Thygerson said outside of court. "There was no intent element to the crime."

The victim walked directly behind the truck, which was not equipped with rear-view mirrors, Thygerson said.

Koutinas would have had to walk around the truck before backing it up to avoid striking her, the attorney said.

"This guy was beside himself with grief," Thygerson said. "It's not an offense for which justice will be served by him being incarcerated."