

## Young man gets life for slayings at Cheli's Chili Bar

Detroit News, The (MI) - Saturday, September 8, 2007

Author: The Detroit News ; Ronald J. Hansen

DETROIT -- The **young man** who stabbed to death two former co-workers **at** the downtown **Cheli's Chili Bar** after they wouldn't rehire him was sentenced Friday to **life** in prison.

It was the only possible punishment **for** Justin Blackshear, 18, of Detroit, who was convicted on two counts of first-degree murder.

"You must be pathological," Wayne Circuit Judge Helen Brown told Blackshear. "My impression of you is that you are the most cold-blooded killer I have ever seen."

Before Brown's sentence, relatives of Mark Barnard, 52, and Megan Jo Soroka, 49, told a packed courtroom of their loss.

Soroka's husband, Christopher, said in a written statement read by a friend that neither he nor the couple's treasured pets have returned to the family's bedroom since her **slaying**. The dogs still seem to look **for** her to return.

"More than 10 years ago, I met a woman who changed my **life** forever," Christopher Soroka wrote. "You took my reason to breathe, and I will never be the same."

Barnard's parents both died within five months of his **slaying**, another loss the family blames on Blackshear.

"Thou shall not kill. It has been a commandment and a law **for** centuries," said Cheryl Bedford, the stepdaughter of Barnard's longtime companion. "There is no other punishment **for** such a crime except **for** prison and then to hell."

While others sobbed throughout the hearing, Blackshear showed little emotion.

Speaking barely above a whisper, he thanked his family " **for** not giving up on me."

Blackshear added, "I'd like to say to the families, I'm sorry **for** their loss."

In another letter, the restaurant's workers noted that Blackshear "took a part of every one of our souls."

Blackshear's grandfather offered an apology outside court and regretted he wasn't permitted to do so inside it.

Brown noted she viewed Blackshear as a threat even to others in prison, and recommended he be held in solitary confinement with his letters screened **for** threats.

The sentencing ends a case heavy on emotion but lacking suspense from the outset on Jan. 2.

That's when Blackshear walked back into the restaurant owned by Detroit Red Wings star Chris Chelios vainly seeking a third chance **at** work.

When Barnard, the kitchen manager, told him to leave, Blackshear picked up a cooking knife and stabbed him 28 times.

Afterward, he lured Soroka, the restaurant manager, to the same room and stabbed her 14 times.

Before leaving, Blackshear stole about \$10,000 from a restaurant safe.

Much of the entire incident was caught on security tape, and several former co-workers recognized him in the restaurant, which wasn't yet opened **for** the day.

A dazed Blackshear was arrested within hours wearing a bloody shirt.

He confessed to police, who learned he was upset in part because his girlfriend was pregnant.

In a statement released after the sentencing, Chelios said: "The past eight months have been very difficult. I am relieved we can now begin to bring closure to this ordeal **for** the friends, family and co-workers of Mark Barnard and Megan Soroka and begin to put this tragedy behind us.

Edition: Online

Section: Metro

Page: 01

Company Name: #keywords2#

Index Terms: MURDER ; PRISON ; TERM

Dateline: DETROIT

Record Number: det30772006

Copyright (c) The Detroit News. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.