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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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70 Years for Possession of Methamphetamine with Intent to Deliver

GALVESTON – Today, Robert Walter Thomas, 40, was sentenced to 70 years in the Institutional Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, as assessed by the jury, for the felony offense of Possession of a Controlled Substance with Intent to Deliver.

On Monday, March 11, 2016, trial began in the 56th District Court. The State presented witness testimony and physical evidence that Robert Thomas possessed 18.41 grams of methamphetamine, a controlled substance, with the intention of selling it, on March 24, 2015.

The Special Crimes Unit of the Galveston County Sheriff's Office began investigating Thomas for drug trafficking in 2014. Based on that investigation, officers executed a search warrant at Thomas' San Leon residence on March 24, 2015. Present at the residence was Thomas, Ashlie Diann Hocutt, and Toni Dawn Pannell. Thomas and Pannell were detained outside the residence. While clearing the residence, Officers found Hocutt in the bathroom flushing a large amount of methamphetamine down the toilet. During a search of the home and persons, Thomas, Hocutt, and Pannell, officers found a total of 18.41 grams of methamphetamine. All three were arrested and charged with possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver. Hocutt was also charged with tampering with evidence.

The jury heard closing arguments on Thursday afternoon and then retired to deliberate. The jury returned less than 15 minutes later with a guilty verdict. Punishment followed, concluding this morning. Thomas faced a punishment range of 25 to 99 years, or Life in prison for the first degree felony offense because of two prior felony enhancements.

During punishment, the State submitted evidence supporting the two enhancements which were both for failure to comply with sexual offender registration requirements, resulting in convictions in 2011 and 2014. Thomas' other felony convictions, submitted by the State, involved a 2003 conviction for possession of marijuana; a 2004 Florida conviction for sexual battery; and a 2011 conviction for delivery of cocaine. The State also presented evidence showing Thomas' involvement and ties to the Aryan Brotherhood criminal organization. After deliberating for less than an hour, the jury returned, shortly before noon today, with a punishment verdict of 70 years confinement. Thomas will not be eligible for parole until at least 15 years of his sentence has been served.

Thomas was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Jennifer Ott and Richard Hayes, II, in the 56th District Court, with Judge Lonnie Cox presiding. The investigation was conducted by the Special Crimes Unit of the Galveston County Sheriff's Office.

In December 2015, co-defendant Ashlie Hocutt pled guilty to possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver and tampering with physical evidence. Hocutt was sentenced to 9 years confinement for both offenses. The charge against Toni Pannell is still pending in the 56th District Court and is scheduled for trial in April 2016.

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