

Third defendant in 2016 gunshot slaying in Upper Darby sentenced to prison

Rene Edwards gets 4-10 years in killing he says he tried to stop co-defendants from committing.



Third defendant in 2016 gunshot slaying in Upper Darby sentenced to prison

By [ALEX ROSE](#) | arose@delcotimes.com | The Delaware County Daily Times

PUBLISHED: February 28, 2023 at 6:16 a.m. | UPDATED: March 1, 2023 at 4:20 p.m.

MEDIA COURTHOUSE — The third and final defendant in the 2016 shooting death of 19-year-old Christopher Thomas was sentenced to four to 10 years in a state prison.



Rene Edwards

Rene Edwards, 29, of Philadelphia, a friend of the victim, entered an open guilty plea to third-degree murder in November 2018.

Deputy District Attorney Geoffrey Paine said that pursuant to that plea agreement, Edwards had assisted prosecutors by testifying at a prior hearing and providing information on the two other defendants, Abdul Dukuray, 27, of Upper Darby, and Rahshawn White-Thorpe, 27, also of Philadelphia.

[Dukuray was sentenced to three to six years in a state prison in October](#) after entering a “no contest” plea to a single charge of firearms not be carried without a license. [White-Thorpe was sentenced to eight to 16 years in September](#) after pleading to third-degree murder, conspiracy and firearms offenses.

According to police reports, Thomas was sitting at Atlantic and Crosley avenues in Upper Darby with two other people on April 6, 2016, about 4:15 p.m. when a car rolled down the street and someone inside opened fire.

Police believe there were three people in the vehicle: A driver and two shooters.

Thomas was struck and fled about 150 yards into the 7000 block of Atlantic Avenue, where he collapsed.

He was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics and an autopsy by the Delaware County Medical Examiner’s Office later determined he had died from gunshot wounds to the neck and chest.

Former Upper Darby Police Superintendent Michael Chitwood said at the time that the shooting was “about a girl,” but “they shot the wrong guy.”

White-Thorpe was arrested two days later and [Edwards, who was already in custody in Lehigh County for possessing a small amount of marijuana, was arrested in May 2016](#). Dukuray was arrested in October 2018.

Victim’s mother speaks

Thomas’ mother, Damian Thomas, [has described her son at prior sentencing hearings](#) as a loving, smart, funny, handsome and respectful young man who longed to go back to school and one day open his own barber shop.

She said Friday that he tried to take his younger siblings under his wing and steer them on a proper path in life, and that he always looked out for his friends, Edwards among them.

“They were friends,” Thomas said, showing the judge a picture of the two together. “I took Rene in when his family put him out.”

Thomas said Friday was bittersweet.

Bitter because she had to look upon Edwards, a person she considered at one point to be part of her family and who ultimately had a hand in killing her son, but also sweet because she could finally feel some closure to the tragedy that had shattered her family for years. Now she can celebrate her son's life rather than continually being ripped back to the that day.

"You lived in my home," she told Edwards. "I took care of you like you were one of my own kids. I loved you, I fed you, and to this day it is a decision I will regret for the rest of my life."

Thomas said she had always felt irrationally guilty for not being able to protect her son, but she was taking her life back with Edwards' sentencing.

"You, no matter what, will forever be a rat who tried to save his own ass and mostly be forever labeled as a murderer to everyone," she told him.

For the defendant

Edwards' godmother, Sabrina Morgan, said she knew Thomas' pain because her own son had been killed when he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and she now ministers to those in similar circumstances.

Morgan said Edwards had told her he was trying to stop his friends from hurting each other when he was there that day, however, and she said she wished he could have minded his own business this time.

Defense attorney Scott Sigman gave the same account: that Edwards had received calls that day from the other two defendants while at work at Wawa. Sigman said Dukuray and White-Thorpe were in a rage and he tried to quell their anger, but he should not have gone with them.

Sigman noted Edwards was not the shooter and did assist with prosecuting both of the other defendants. Edwards was also a volunteer firefighter who was active in his church, said Sigman, and Morgan described him as a model prisoner.

Defendant speaks

"I respect and honor your emotions," Edwards told Thomas Friday. "I really did try my best to stop either side from arguing."

Edwards said he did not know how bad the situation had gotten on social media because he did not have a Twitter account, but said the victim did not have anything to do with it and that what happened to him was wrong.

"To this day, I'm emotionally messed up," he said. "I can't talk. I can't even cry. My emotions are all destroyed. ... It's selfish of me to ask for your forgiveness, but I just

want you to know that I honestly did try. No matter what nobody said, I honestly did try. I didn't even want them fighting.”

In addition to prison time, Common Pleas Court Judge Mary Alice Brennan ordered Edwards to provide a DNA sample to state police and forfeit the firearm.