

Judge gives man 40-year sentence in strangling

Killer called 'a mean drunk'

By **Erlin Emery**
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A man convicted of strangling a 71-year-old Colorado Springs man during a drinking bout last year was sentenced to 40 years in prison Monday.

Paul Swanson, 35, was convicted of second-degree murder in the June 1991 killing of Orville Head.

"I'm sorry for all the grief this has caused everyone involved," Swanson told 4th Judicial District Judge Richard Toth.

Swanson, an alcohol abuser who has been arrested four times during the past decade for drunken driving, was drinking with Head on the morning he died. Head's apartment at the Skyview Motel, 2908 N. Nevada Ave., was the site of many late-night drinking parties, authorities say.

Head was found in his bed. Because he had scratches on his body, an autopsy was ordered. Dr. David Bowerman, El Paso County coroner, ruled that Head had died of natural causes; he had been in poor health for some time and had numerous life-threatening ailments. His body, at 108 pounds, had a 0.33 blood alcohol content. The investigation was closed.

But five months later, the investigation was reopened after police went to Swanson's home during a domestic fight and his wife told them, "If you want a murder solved, Paul killed Orville Head."

Another woman, a longtime friend of Swanson's, testified at his two-day trial in Septem-

ber that he had confessed to killing Head.

But in court Monday, Swanson denied that he had confessed to the two women — confessions that were essentially the only evidence at his trial.

"I had a desire to make myself out to be something I am not," Swanson said. He said he wanted people to believe he was a killer "for the purpose of intimidation."

"I was just trying to have a good story," Swanson said.

But the judge did not believe him.

"You confessed to it to several people, and I believe you committed this offense," Toth said. "It was a brutal offense, and it had to be a painful death for Mr. Head."

"Obviously, from the testimony at the trial, you are a mean drunk."

Toth said that two alcohol treatment programs the court had ordered for Swanson in the past apparently didn't make a difference. He still became violent when he drank.

"It's not often that I see a man killed by another man's hands — bare hands. Usually, it's a gun. It was a brutal murder, and it deserves a lot of time," Toth said.

Prosecutor Dan Kay urged Toth to sentence Swanson to 40 years, saying, "This case has opened all of our eyes about a part of society that we would all like to ignore."

"Orville was down on his luck, but he still was a person."