

## Moped driver pleads guilty in pedestrian hit-and-run

BY KEITH EPPS / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

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**A** Fredericksburg man who crashed a moped into a pedestrian July 29—fracturing the young woman’s jaw—before fleeing the scene pleaded guilty to two charges Wednesday.

Thomas William Johnson, 43, was convicted of felony hit-and-run and being a habitual offender. He will be sentenced Feb. 26 in Fredericksburg Circuit Court.

According to the evidence presented by city prosecutor Travis Bird, the 21-year-old victim was walking along the Rappahannock Heritage Trail with her boyfriend that evening when they came to a crosswalk in the 1800 block of Princess Anne Street.

Traffic stopped to let the pedestrians cross, and the woman was just a few steps from the other side of the street when a moped traveling between 25 and 30 miles per hour swerved around the stopped vehicles and slammed into her.

The impact knocked the woman down, leaving her with the fractured jaw and cuts to her arms, legs and chin.

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Bird said Johnson went to the woman’s boyfriend to ask if she was OK, then got the man to help him pick up the moped, which was transporting a bag of beer bottles that were broken in the crash.

By the time police came, Johnson had bolted, leaving the moped behind. His live-in girlfriend, Melissa Gerke, showed up a short time later claiming that someone had stolen her moped. She later admitted that Johnson had permission to ride the moped.

Gerke was charged with obstruction of justice, but court records show she was found not guilty on Sept. 26.

Johnson was found later July 29 hiding in a shed at Gerke's residence. He was intoxicated, but Bird said he couldn't prove Johnson didn't drink after the accident.

Johnson spent three days in Mary Washington Hospital being treated for injuries he suffered in the crash.

Johnson left the hospital without medical clearance and was on the run for more than a month before being apprehended in Stafford on Sept. 6.

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