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COUNTY OF SHASTA

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Men Plead to Voluntary Manslaughter in Kicking Death

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Today, Nathan Robert Byers, 21, and Richard James Hiers, 24, pled guilty to the crime of voluntary manslaughter in the death of Claude Alexander Schmies. They also pled guilty to the crime of assault with force likely to cause great bodily injury and admitted an enhancement for causing great bodily injury on John Fritz. The plea was in exchange for an eight year state prison sentence. Both men were immediately sentenced.

The charges stemmed from an altercation that occurred on July 20, 2014, at about 12:30 a.m. The victims were in a vehicle driven by Mr. Schmies when they engaged in a verbal altercation with Hiers and Byers who were walking down Veda Street in Redding. Hiers and Byers were heavily intoxicated at the time of the altercation. The victims exited their vehicle with flashlights and Hiers and Byers ran toward the vehicle and they all engaged in a fight near the intersection. Mr. Schmies and Hiers fought on one side of the vehicle and Byers and Mr. Fritz fought on the other side of the vehicle. After it appeared Hiers was getting the better of Mr. Schmies, Mr. Fritz ran over and hit Hiers in the head with a flashlight. Byers followed Mr. Fritz and all four continued to fight. The fight ended when both victims were knocked unconscious in the roadway and Hiers and Byers returned to Hiers' residence, which was nearby.

The initial call to 911 reported the altercation as a traffic accident with two unconscious individuals in the roadway and the California High Patrol was requested to respond. It was determined during the course of a lengthy 911 call that a fight had occurred and there was no traffic accident. Unfortunately, due to other emergencies reported at the same time, law enforcement did not arrive for more than 20 minutes. During that time, Hiers and Byers repeatedly returned to the location where the victims were laying because they feared that the victims were going to flee before law enforcement could arrive. At one point, Mr. Schmies regained consciousness and both

Hiers and Byers kicked and/or stomped Mr. Schmies in the head during this subsequent altercation. Mr. Schmies never regained consciousness and died in the hospital as a result of blunt force trauma to his head. Mr. Fritz also regained consciousness after the initial fight. Mr. Fritz stood up and both Hiers and Byers attacked him and knocked him to the ground where he was knocked unconscious a second time. Mr. Fritz spent several days in the hospital but ultimately recovered.

The case was investigated by the Redding Police Department Investigators Daniel Smetak and Levi Solada, and was prosecuted by Senior Deputy District Attorney Emily Mees.