

Alton man sentenced to 57 years in prison for shooting and killing person in apartment complex

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EDWARDSVILLE - An Alton man was sentenced to 57 years in prison for the shooting and killing of a local man in February 2014 at the Storey Manor Apartment complex in Cottage Hills.



Justin D. Vaughn, 25, was convicted by a Madison County jury on June 19, 2015, following a week-long jury trial in Edwardsville. Officers from the Alton Police Department responded to the apartment complex following a report of shots fired at approximately 10:00 p.m. on the evening of February 5, 2014. They determined that there had been a shooting and that the victim, Demetrius C. Lucas, 30, had been taken to Alton Memorial Hospital before their arrival.

Lucas, who was from Alton, had been shot twice, was transferred to a St. Louis-area hospital shortly thereafter and pronounced dead approximately an hour later. Vaughn, who lived in the apartment complex, was taken into custody around 2:30 a.m. on February 6, 2014. The investigation determined that the men got into an argument during a dice game at a birthday party for Vaughn that escalated into the shooting death of Lucas.

Assistant State's Attorneys Crystal Uhe and Rachelle Crowe, of the Violent Crimes Unit of the State's Attorney's Office, presented evidence which supported the state's case that Vaughn deliberately shot Lucas rather than as an act of self-defense as claimed by Vaughn's defense attorneys. During the trial, Circuit Judge Richard Tognarelli denied a motion by the defense that would have allowed jurors to consider self-defense in their deliberations. After less than 90 minutes of deliberation, the jury returned guilty verdicts on First Degree Murder (Class M felony) and Unlawful Possession of Weapons by a Felon (Class 2 felony) charges. Vaughn had previous felony convictions from 2011 on Mob Action and Unlawful Restraint.

Vaughn was sentenced by Judge Tognarelli to 50 years on the murder and 7 years for the unlawful weapons possession. Penalty range for a murder conviction ranges 20-60 years in prison; however, since Vaughn used a firearm, he was eligible for an additional 25 years. Penalty range for a Class 2 Felony was 3-7 years in prison. The sentences are consecutive. Vaughn will be required to serve 100% of the 50-year sentence for the murder, and then serve at least 50 percent of the 7-year sentence.

State's Attorney Tom Gibbons commended the work of his prosecutors and their trial team for their victory in convicting Vaughn. "With this lengthy prison sentence, we have successfully removed a violent man from our community," said State's Attorney Gibbons. "I'm proud of the work of my staff, and everyone involved, from the Alton Police Department, to the Coroner and medical personnel, who assisted us in obtaining justice for the family of Demetrius Lucas. I hope that today's sentencing provided them with closure on this difficult period in their lives." Gibbons also thanked the jury for their service. "Their swift conviction of Vaughn shows that violence will not be tolerated in Madison County."