

*United States Attorney's Office
Northern District of Iowa*



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: August 17, 2004

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**MAN SENTENCED ON FEDERAL FIREARMS CHARGES ARISING OUT OF
OCTOBER 8, 2002, SHOOTING INCIDENT WHERE
SHELDON TEENAGER, SHELLEY GONNERMAN, WAS KILLED**

United States Attorney Charles W. Larson, Sr. announced today that a Sheldon man who made and used sawed-off shotguns was sentenced on August 4, 2004, to more than 12 years in federal prison. One of the shotguns discharged and killed Sheldon teenager Shelley Gonnerman in October 2002.

LATHAN MATRELL BARNETT, age 25, from Sheldon, O'Brien County, Iowa received a **145 month** prison term on August 4, 2004, after he entered guilty pleas to four federal firearms charges. He pled guilty to charges of using and carrying a short barreled shotgun during a crime of violence; making sawed-off shotguns which were not registered with the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record; knowingly possessing sawed-off shortened shotguns which were not registered with the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record; and possessing two short-barreled and shortened-length shotguns while being an unlawful user of marijuana.

BARNETT was sentenced in federal court in Sioux City by United States District Court Judge Mark W. Bennett. **BARNETT** was sentenced to 109 months imprisonment on the charge of using an illegal shotgun during a crime of violence. He received a sentence of 36 months, consecutive to the 109-month sentence, on the other counts. Special assessments totalling \$400 were imposed and **BARNETT** was ordered to make restitution to Shelley Gonnerman's family in the amount of \$8,399.49. The restitution was to cover medical and funeral expenses the family incurred as a result of her death. **BARNETT** is jointly and severally liable for the restitution with co-defendant Shane Meyer. **BARNETT** must also serve a term of supervised release of up to three years. There is no parole in the federal system. **BARNETT** is being held in United States Marshals' custody until he can be transferred to a federal prison.

At a guilty plea hearing held previously, **BARNETT** admitted that between about September 1, 2002, and about October 8, 2002, at the home of co-defendant Shane Meyer in Sheldon, he possessed two altered firearms, a weapon made from a Harrington & Richardson 16 gauge shotgun and a weapon made from a Savage Arms 12 gauge shotgun. The two sawed-off firearms were altered by **BARNETT** and Shane Meyer, who cut off the barrels and other parts of the firearms. Those two firearms and a third sawed-off shotgun were stolen by Meyer from Meyer's father's residence, and the serial numbers were altered or obliterated.

BARNETT also admitted that on October 8, 2002, he was at Shane Meyer's residence in Sheldon with Meyer and Shelley Gonnerman, who at that time was under the age of 18. **BARNETT** and Meyer had the three short-barreled shotguns they had cut down. The third short-barreled shotgun was a weapon they had made from a New England Firearms, 20 gauge single-shot shotgun, which had been repainted after it was altered. **BARNETT** picked up the 20 gauge shotgun and was holding it to look at it after it was repainted. Shelley Gonnerman was next to **BARNETT** as he held the 20 gauge shotgun. The shotgun discharged and Shelley Gonnerman was killed. Meyer was in the kitchen of his residence when this occurred.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Kevin C. Fletcher and investigated by the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, O'Brien County Sheriff's Office, Sheldon Police Department, Iowa State Patrol, and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The O'Brien County Attorney's Office assisted in the investigation.

"This prosecution is one aspect of the Department of Justice's Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative," said U.S. Attorney Larson. "This initiative emphasizes crime reduction partnerships among community organizations and local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies."

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a national priority of the U.S. Department of Justice and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. PSN helps network existing programs that target gun crime and provides tools and resources at the local and national levels to support the network.