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Section: News

DUI suspect killed in crash during chase

Article Text:

A Putnam County man was fatally injured when he wrecked his car while fleeing a law officer yesterday afternoon.

Leonard E. Rodgers, 42, of Jesse Rodgers Road, Bloomington Springs, was pronounced dead at the hospital following the accident, which happened just after 4 p.m. on Highway 291 just off Highway 70 in Double Springs.

Rodgers wrecked the 1990 Chevrolet Lumina he was driving as Putnam Sheriff's Deputy Todd Logan pursued him, attempting to stop the speeding car on suspicion that the driver was drunk, officials said.

After the accident, Deputy Logan and others officers who came to the scene lifted the wrecked car off the injured driver, who had been ejected during the wreck, according to Sheriff David Andrews.

Rodgers was then taken to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead from injuries suffered in the accident.

The Tennessee Highway Patrol was called in to work the accident, and Trooper Scott Bilbrey filed the following report:

"The vehicle was traveling north on Highway 291 and was being pursued by the Putnam County Sheriff's Department.

"The vehicle traveled off the right side of the roadway, struck a culvert, and traveled up an embankment. The driver was ejected, and the vehicle came to final rest on top of the driver."

The trooper's report says the car traveled 162 feet from the point where it left the roadway to the point where it came to rest.

The trooper also noted on the report that drinking is believed to be a factor in the accident and that Rodgers was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the accident.

Use of a safety belt might have made a difference in the outcome, the trooper said.

No official report on the case was available from the Putnam Sheriff's Department this morning, but Sheriff Andrews said that Deputy Logan had attempted to stop the car after the driver had already caught the attention of Baxter Police Chief Mike Payne in that town.

He said Deputy Logan saw the car weaving in the roadway and saw it run into a ditch. He pursued the car, which was traveling at a high speed, but backed off as the chase neared the intersection of Highway 291 and Highway 70, the sheriff said.

The deputy witnessed the wreck and called for an ambulance.

In addition to Sheriff Andrews, others who came to the scene included Deputies Brian Maxwell and Joe Davis and Baxter Chief Payne.

This morning, Chief Payne told the Herald-Citizen that he had first seen the Rodgers car on Main Street in Baxter just shortly before the accident.

"I met the car and had my radar on, and he was doing 40 mph in a 30 mph zone, so I flashed by blue lights as a warning," Payne said.

"I noticed that he then kind of hit the shoulder of the road, but immediately came back onto the road and I just thought he might have been looking back at me to see if I was coming after him. "But I didn't. I just went on, and a short time later, I heard on the radio that Deputy Logan was in pursuit of a car meeting that description and I went up there."

Chief Payne and Officer Donnie Qualls arrived at the scene just after the wreck, and they, along with Deputy Logan and others lifted the car off the injured man, he said.

"He seemed to be conscious at that time," Chief Payne said.

Putnam Ambulance medics rushed to the scene and took Rodgers to the hospital, but were unable to save him. Reportedly, he died of head and chest injuries.

His body was sent to Nashville for an autopsy, officials said.

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