

Teens plead guilty to assault in Avessuk's death

Two teenagers accused of beating a native man to death in downtown Anchorage on July 4 have had murder charges dropped by the state. The state as accepted guilty pleas to lesser charges from the two teenagers accused of beating Collins Avessuk to death.

Anchorage Superior Court Judge Seaborn Buckalew agreed to dismiss second-degree murder charges against Gary Whittle and Michael Lynn Nardella, both 18, in connection with the killing of Avessuk, in Superior Court on Tuesday, December 30.

In exchange, the teenage boys pleaded guilty to first degree assault charges.

Both Whittle and Nardella had originally pleaded innocent to second-degree murder and first-degree assault charges.

Assistant district attorney George Edwards explained the plea agreement at Tuesday's hearing, saying the high level of alcohol present in the victim's blood at the time of the incident could have "been a significant factor" in Avessuk's death. Avessuk,

according to Anchorage pathologist Donald Rogers testimony had a .537 blood alcohol content during the time of his death.

Assistant district attorney Edwards told the judge that there was no question the defendants placed a heavy barrel on the victim following the fight and that alcohol may have killed Avessuk, anyway.

According to a state report found in the court file, their victim was in a semi-conscious state when the two placed Avessuk into a dumpster and dropped a two hundred-pound grease-filled barrel on Avessuk's body.

According to state's report, Whittle and Nardella confessed to Anchorage police to beating Avessuk

hours before his death.

At the sentencing hearing schedule for February 27 th before Judge Buckalew, the two can receive up to 20 years in jail and a \$50,000 fine. The two boys are free on bail in custody of their parents until the sentencing.