

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL®

WEEK OF JUNE 9, 2008

Father-Daughter Law Firm Wins Record-Setting Case

Holds Company Accountable for Putting Bad Driver on Road

BY THOM SENZEE
Contributing Reporter

With a new record win to its credit, law firm Grassini and Wrinkle of Woodland Hills has plaintiffs in a recent personal-injury case singing its praises, while the medical community in Ventura moves on without a core member.

The case centered on a truck driver who a jury agreed had not been sufficiently trained for safety, and whom the employer knew had been fired by a past employer for unsafe driving.

"Their excuse was—they literally said this—'we needed to get bodies behind the wheel,'" said the firm's founding partner, Lawrence Grassini.

But what made this case different is the make-up of the plaintiff's counsel.

"It does get the attention of juries, a father-and-daughter team of lawyers," Lawrence Grassini said in an interview at his firm's offices on Ventura Boulevard shortly after he and daughter Katie Grassini, along with attorney Don Liddy, won \$22 million for their client.

The plaintiff suffered extensive brain damage as a result of an accident caused by truck driver Jose Gerardo Carcamo, employed by Sugar Transport of Stockton. The California Highway Patrol says Carcamo caused a pick-up truck to flip into opposing lanes and land on Dawn Diaz's vehicle. The bulk of the multimillion-dollar award—\$16 million—is for past and future medical expenses.

"We are very at ease and comfortable knowing we'll be able to meet the future medical needs and services for our injured daughter due to the excellent work of Mr. Grassini and his firm," said David Anderson, Ms. Diaz father.

Diaz has a daughter of her own, who is 10. "Mr. Grassini kept our hopes up from the



Awards: The Grassini's track record is tops.

beginning," Anderson said. "And did everything he said he'd be able to do for us."

The win joins a litany of record awards for the firm, including one of the biggest personal injury awards in U.S. history, the biggest award in Orange County history, the biggest against the City of Los Angeles and the largest award for a quadriplegic in California history.

"This case was both sad and gratifying," Mr. Grassini said. "Ms. Diaz started working at Community Hospital in Ventura when she was 18 as a clerk, and they were so impressed with her that they gave her a scholarship and sent her to nursing school."

Dawn Renae Diaz was not only a nurse at Community Memorial Hospital for many years; she was the head emergency room nurse there and is well known in the region for her compassion. Colleagues at the facility reportedly referred to her as the "heart of the hospital."

"She was the best nurse I'd ever worked with. When she was in charge or just around, everything in the E.R. was perfect," said one doctor who testified during the trial. "She was a real patient's advocate, especially if you were critically injured. Dawn Diaz was the nurse you'd want to take care of you."

The accident left Diaz unable to work.

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That Sneaky Dad

The law firm's lobby features glass-encased multimedia displays of its record wins. But on display in Mr. Grassini's private office is a decidedly less sophisticated, yet supremely prized artifact from a case in which he won what was then a record-breaking \$17 million punitive-damages award that was upheld by the Supreme Court of the United States.

"This is something that came in very handy during the trial of ventriiloquist Paul Winchell against Metromedia," the senior Grassini said as he picked up a small, tattered memo pad from a bookshelf near his desk.

In the 1980s, Mr. Grassini had given a then ten-year-old Katie Grassini the pad to make notes on as she watched videos of the "Paul Winchell-Jerry Mahoney" television puppet show, so her father could reference, in court, specific episodes not only by the title or show number, but also with comments about content.

"I thought, 'oh being a lawyer is fun,'" Ms. Grassini recalls. "You get to watch fun TV shows and write about them."

Mr. Grassini says he never mentioned to the jury how he had done his research regarding the episodes, but at the time enjoyed knowing his young daughter had been an integral part of the syndication-rights lawsuit.

"It is such an honor to work with my father," Katie Grassini said. "Not just because he's my dad, but because he is passionate about protecting individuals and for sticking up for the little guy."

Rooting for the underdog, she says, is a Grassini family trait.

An official from the Ventura County Bar Association confirmed that the award was the largest in the region at least during the last decade and probably ever.

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