

Glouco boy hurt in fireworks explosion awarded \$1.6M

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WOODBURY

A Gloucester County jury on Friday awarded \$1.6 million to a Woodbury Heights boy who lost most of his left hand in a 1995 fireworks explosion.

The jury decided \$896,000, or 56 percent of the judgment awarded to Brenden Wasniewski, should be paid by Deptford Township,

which hosted a May 1995 fireworks display at Fasola Park in the township.

Wasniewski, then 10, found an unexploded fireworks device in the park after the show that he took home and attempted to light six weeks later, according to testimony at the two-week trial. The explosion, more than two hundred times as powerful as blasts from firecrackers sold to consumers, left Was-

niewski with only his little finger and part of his thumb on his left hand, said his lawyer, Louis J. DeVoto.

Fireworks by Girone, a Vineland company, conducted the fireworks show for Deptford and was a defendant in Wasniewski's lawsuit. Girone previously settled with his client for an undisclosed amount, DeVoto said.

The verdict "was a clear

signal to others conducting these displays that dangerous explosives can't be left behind," said DeVoto.

Deptford's lawyer, Robert Hicken, said still to be resolved are township claims against Girone's insurer, which had issued a \$1 million surety bond covering the fireworks show. Deptford contends Girone's settlement "was made in bad faith" because it did not include the township, said

Hicken.

The Wasniewski family had no immediate comment when contacted Friday.

Witnesses in the trial included Deptford fire marshal Steven Hubbs, who DeVoto said testified he was unaware of Deptford's contractual requirement with Girone to conduct a "first light" inspection of the grounds around the fireworks show the next day.

Girone checked the area immediately after the nighttime show, he said.

Wasniewski testified he found the six-inch long, three-quarter-inch round aerial fireworks device on a basketball court, DeVoto said. He hid it at home for six weeks before lighting it outdoors at a friend's house, he said. The jury determined Wasniewski was 11 percent responsible for his injuries.