

Widow awarded \$2.3 million for death of husband in car crash

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CAMDEN

A Sewell woman and her 5-year-old daughter were awarded \$2.3 million on Thursday as compensation for pain, suffering and lost income after the death of their husband and father in a traffic accident.

The award, by Superior Court Judge William J. Cook, followed a four-day, non-jury trial in Camden to establish liability and set damages in the June 25, 1995, death of Hristos Vassiliu.

Vassiliu, 35, had emigrated from Greece in 1986. After teaching himself to read and write English, he owned and operated several restaurants in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Vassiliu's wife, Christine, was 24 and pregnant with the couple's first child, Christina, at the time of the accident. The crash occurred when another driver disregarded a stop sign and flashing light at the intersection of routes 604 and 553 in Franklin Township and struck Vassiliu's van.

Mrs. Vassiliu's attorney, Louis J. DeVoto, said Vassiliu, who was alone at the time, suffered a fractured neck, which made it impossible for him to breathe.

Medical experts said he remained conscious for about two minutes before his death.

Cook ruled that the other driver, Shaun O'Brien, then 18, of Voorhees, was 100 percent responsible for the accident.

DeVoto said that while O'Brien had "significant insurance coverage, it is unlikely there will be enough insurance for the family to receive the

full amount of the verdict." He said Vassiliu's motor vehicle insurance coverage would also contribute to his widow's finances.