
Jury awards \$31 million to family of man killed in '07 crash

By JOSÉ PATIÑO GIRONA | The Tampa Tribune

The family of a man killed in a March 2007 crash was awarded nearly \$31 million in damages Thursday in a wrongful death suit against Geico Insurance.

The insurance giant failed to honor benefits that Gerard Bottini had acquired under his insurance policy and claimed he was at fault in the crash.

The family, represented by attorneys Steve Yerrid and David Dickey, took Geico to court and a Hillsborough County jury ruled in its favor.

"It has been a long road to justice, and I am so very grateful the jury cleared Gerard's name," said Gerard Bottini's widow, Mary Bottini, in a statement. "Now we will go forward with forgiveness and closure as best we can."

Bottini, who was 46 and president of Tampa's Data Print Inc., was driving his Ford F-250 pickup in the left lane of Interstate 75 in Hillsborough County with two friends aboard when a Nissan Altima in front of his vehicle blew its engine, causing a thick, black smoke that impaired Bottini's visibility, Yerrid said.

Seeing that there were vehicles approaching in the right lane and a tractor trailer behind him, Bottini slowed down and tried to pull off into the grassy median, but the vehicle rolled over and crushed the roof on the driver's side, Yerrid said.

Bottini, who wasn't wearing a seat belt, was killed. His two passengers survived the crash. Yerrid said the truck's roof collapsed on the driver's side 3 inches from the seat.

The defense argued that Bottini panicked and over-steered, which caused his vehicle to roll over.

Attempts to contact attorneys for Geico were unsuccessful.

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