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Jury awards \$1.4M after parking lot crash injury

BY LAURAANN WOOD

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A Winnebago County jury has awarded \$1.4 million to a woman who suffered a back injury after her car was rear-ended in a parking lot.

The verdict came earlier this month in plaintiff Stacy Stepancik-Goff's negligence case. She sued Janice Warner in 2012, alleging the motorist failed to keep her 2006 Saab under control before crashing into the back of her 2004 Ford van.

Stepancik-Goff was parked in front of a roadside snack shop in Roscoe and had just returned to her vehicle from purchasing snacks for her son's sporting event, said Brian L. Salvi, an associate at Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard P.C. who represented the plaintiff.

"She gets into the car, gets into the driver's seat and sets her things down beside her. Before she can even get her seat belt on, she gets rear-ended in the back driver's side area of the bumper," Salvi said.

The collision caused two disk herniations — one more severe than the other — in Stepancik-Goff's cervical spine, Salvi said.

Within two months of the incident, he said, doctors recommended she undergo a two-level decompression and fusion surgery.

But she developed a thyroid condition that has made it dangerous to go under general anesthesia, he said, so the surgery was postponed.

Stepancik-Goff underwent emergency surgery in January to remove her thyroid gland, Salvi said, so her next step is to receive clearance to undergo the decompression and fusion surgery.

"It's more likely that she will be cleared now that she had an emergency surgery to remove the thyroid, and that's right in the neck area, so her doctor told her she needs to wait a year before she can get clearance for the decompression and fusion surgery," he said.

She also suffers from radiating pain down her left side and a neuropathic pain condition that shoots pain down her left arm into her left hand, Salvi said.

Warner, who Salvi said was operating her vehicle over the legal intoxication limit at the time of the incident, admitted negligence in 2013 but contested the extent and nature of Stepancik-Goff's injuries.

The case then proceeded to a four-day trial before 17th Judicial Circuit Judge J. Edward Prochaska, who presides over the Rockford court's Civil Division, without the defense offering to settle for anything above \$25,000, said Patrick A. Salvi II, a partner at



Brian L. Salvi



Patrick A. Salvi II

Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard who also represented the plaintiff.

"She would have accepted a much lesser sum, and our final demand was \$1.25 million, but they never offered anything other than \$25,000," he said.

The jury awarded Stepancik-Goff \$140,000 for future medical expenses, \$35,000 for risk of harm, \$325,000 for past loss of a normal life, \$150,000 for future loss of a normal life, \$200,000 for past emotional distress, \$100,000 for future emotional distress, \$200,000 for past pain and suffering and \$250,000 for future pain and suffering.

Once the verdict was announced, Brian Salvi said, everyone on Stepancik-Goff's trial team was happy to learn her voice was

heard — especially the plaintiff herself.

"This is been six-and-a-half years where her life has really been turned upside-down, and then struggling along the way as this litigation has persisted and the defense had taken such a hard line as to how they interpreted the case," he said, noting part of Warner's defense contended his client was either faking or exaggerating her injuries.

Bill Porter, a partner at Chilton Yambert Porter LLP who represented Warner, could not be reached for comment.

Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard associate Andrew J. Burkavage also represented the plaintiff.

The case is *Stacy Stepancik-Goff v. Janice Warner*, 12 AR 60.