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Man hit by city truck awarded \$2.4M

29-year-old who broke four vertebrae and two bones can get back to normal life, lawyers say

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A Cook County jury has awarded \$2.4 million to a 29-year-old man who suffered multiple injuries after a city-owned truck hit him while he stood on a sidewalk.

On May 21, 2011, Stephen Dewart was on the corner of Rush and Cedar streets in the Gold Coast neighborhood attending a photo shoot for his wife's wedding-planning business.

He was then hit by a Streets & Sanitation Department pickup truck driven by employee Dwight Washington.

Dewart broke four vertebrae and two bones in his right leg. After three surgeries, he completed his physical therapy in July.

Following a trial over damages presided over by Cook County Circuit Judge Gregory J. Wojkowski, the jury deliberated for less than two hours before rendering its verdict Friday.

The city had admitted liability for Dewart's injuries prior to trial. As a result, Wojkowski did

not admit evidence about Washington's intoxication or that there were additional victims.

Dewart was represented by Levin & Perconti partner Susan L. Novosad and associate Jordan S. Powell.

Novosad said she was grateful for the verdict and that she believes it was a fair and reasonable compensation that validates the severity of her client's injuries.

"It's one thing to admit fault," Novosad said. "It's another thing to accept what you've done."

Dewart, now living in Bloomington, Ind., and enrolled in graduate school at Indiana University, said he was "completely taken aback" by the verdict.

"It was very humbling to see a jury of everyday people listening to my story," Dewart said.

Dewart said he was glad the jurors recognized how much the crash impacted his life, despite the city's efforts to downplay the long-term effect of his injuries.

Several jurors even spoke with Dewart after reaching their verdict to express sympathy for him, he said.



Jordan S. Powell



Susan L. Novosad

Dewart's lawyers said seeing others' compassion and receiving compensation will make it easier for their client to fully return to normalcy.

"It will help him move on to the next chapter of his life," Powell said.

Mark D. Harrison and Vickie Argueta from the city's Law Department represented the city in the suit.

Department spokesman Roderick Drew declined to comment on the verdict.

The case is *Stephen Dewart and Sharokina Pazand v. City of Chicago and Dwight Washington*, No. 11 L 005791.

Washington, whose registered blood alcohol content was twice the state's legal limit at the time of the crash, received a nine-year prison sentence for hitting Dewart and others on the sidewalk.

He pleaded guilty to four counts of aggravated driving under the influence.

In December, the city settled a lawsuit from another victim. The city agreed to pay \$6.25 million to Richard Chang, who suffered a brain injury, and his wife, Leeann Chang.

At least one other victim, Jennifer Anton, has a lawsuit pending against the city and Washington.