

## Jury awards \$60 million in case against Naples bar

By: Jacob Carpenter

At the end of an emotionally taxing trial, during which she wept through testimony about her severely injured daughter, Joan Antonuccio couldn't comprehend what just happened.

A jury had awarded her \$60 million.

"It's just like I heard it, but I was still so drained from crying," said Antonuccio, a 54-year-old bartender at Tropicana Field. "Honest to God, my biggest crisis or issue of the day was trying to get back up to St. Pete because the Rays were playing the Yankees."

Four days later, Antonuccio said Tuesday that she's still in shock after a Collier County jury last week handed down the massive judgment against a North Naples pub, whose in 2003 bartenders negligently served Antonuccio's then-19-year-old daughter too much alcohol.

Following a night out with friends, Antonuccio's daughter, Angela Crowe, and her intoxicated boyfriend crashed into a tree, causing her to be permanently disabled.

The verdict capped a strange eight-year lawsuit against the pub's owners, who skipped virtually all court hearings, and gave a measure of victory to the beleaguered mother.

Jurors ruled that Antonuccio, a bartender herself, is entitled to \$10 million to cover lost wages and expenses, plus \$50 million for pain and suffering. The bar owners didn't have insurance, and it's somewhat unclear who owned the pub at the time of the crash, so Antonuccio said she expects to receive just a fraction of the judgment.

"For every dollar that I may or may not get, I've cried a million tears," said Antonuccio, who lives in the Tampa suburb of Brandon. "We don't know what may or may not come out of this, but my attorney was like, 'At least it's symbolic.'"

On a weekend in March weekend in 2003, Crowe went to Spectators, a sports pub on U.S. 41 near Vanderbilt Beach Road, with her boyfriend, brother and brother's girlfriend. All were underage except for Crowe's boyfriend, 22-year-old Isaac Steves.

The bartenders knew Crowe personally and were aware that she was 19, yet they continued to serve her. At night's end, an intoxicated Crowe got into Steves' vehicle. While driving on Golden Gate Boulevard, Steves dozed off and crashed head-on into a tree. Steves wasn't injured, but Crowe sustained brain damage, broken legs, a lacerated liver, multiple rib fractures and other injuries.

Steves was charged with DUI and served a year in jail.

Antonuccio sued the bar for negligence in 2007, days before the statute of limitations ran out. A judge granted a motion for default that held the bar owners liable, allowing a jury to determine the damages owed Friday.

**“Had she not been inebriated, she could have made a more informed decision” about getting in the car with Steves, said Antonuccio’s lawyer, Ray Rasco, of Miami.**

In a peculiar twist, it’s not immediately clear who would be responsible for paying out the \$60 million.

The defendant in the case was Spectators3 LLC, a North Naples company that owned the now-closed Spectators. State business records filed in January 2003, two months before the crash, list two managing members of the company: Joseph Skladany and Eric Hyde. The lawsuit listed another potential owner, Alberto Colarusso.

But in 2007, Colarusso told the Daily News that he and Skladany sold the bar before Crowe’s crash. In the months leading up to trial, court documents were sent to Agron Slova, listed as the last manager of Spectators3 LLC before it dissolved in 2008. But Slova said Tuesday that he had no involvement with the company in March 2003, a claim supported by state business records.

“I wasn’t the owner of the place. I have no idea who owned it. I have no idea what kind of insurance they had,” Slova said.

As a result, nobody was present for the defense at the trial Friday. Rasco said the verdict gives him more authority to dig into financial records to determine who was responsible for the bar.

**“I can ask a lot of questions that I couldn’t before to see if there’s an avenue to collect some of the \$60 million,” Rasco said.**

Now 31 years old, Crowe recently moved into a Clearwater home where she receives daily care, Antonuccio said. She moves gingerly with help from a walker after years of physical therapy. She recognizes her mother, but she often repeats questions she asked two minutes ago. A trip to see the movie “Furious 7” last week constituted a good day, Antonuccio said.

After years of personally caring for her daughter round-the-clock, of neglecting her own needs, Antonuccio hopes the money will help ease her back toward normalcy. With part of the money, she talks of paying off bills, buying herself a drum set, maybe even getting a paint job on her 20-year-old Mitsubishi car.

“I’m not going to hold my breath, but that would be nice just to even get a fraction, just to pick up the pieces, so to speak,” Antonuccio said. “We’re never going to complete the puzzle, but I just want to get through this life.”

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