

CRASH SUIT BRINGS \$1.5 MILLION AWARD

This was the headline in the Allentown Morning Call on April 12, 2001. The week before, Pete Hileman, attorney for the Plaintiff, had completed presentation of the case which involved serious injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident. Courthouse observers felt the verdict to be one of the largest in the history of Lehigh County, which is known for its low jury verdicts. According to cases published in Legal Intelligencer and Pa. law weekly, the verdict was one of the 50 largest verdicts in Pennsylvania in 2001.

The Plaintiff was a passenger in a Lehigh County van which was on its way to the prison when it was broadsided by a UGI gas utility van which ran a red traffic light. The Plaintiff developed chronic back pain and was diagnosed with an internal disc disruption which eventually required a two level fusion. He remained in chronic pain and unable to work or to engage in any meaningful activity without significant pain. UGI admitted negligence but argued that the Plaintiff had a pre-existing back condition and sustained only minor injuries in the accident and should have been able to work. Mr. Hileman presented the testimony of the orthopedic surgeon who showed the jury how the accident caused the disc disruption and debilitating pain. Vocational experts described why the Plaintiff would never be able to return to work at his previous job and would be forced to work at much lower paying jobs.

The jury's verdict awarded the Plaintiff the exact amount Mr. Hileman had asked for economic damages (medical bills, wage loss and future loss of earning capacity) and an additional \$500,000 for pain and suffering. After the trial, Judge Black granted Mr. Hileman's petition to add delay damages in the amount of \$302,000, entering judgment against UGI for nearly \$1.9 million. UGI's appeal to the Superior Court was denied.