

Kennywood jury awards family \$1.2 million

By Bobby Kerlik

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An Allegheny County jury Friday awarded the family of a Monroeville woman \$1.21 million in compensatory damages more than five years after she was killed in a pavilion collapse at Kennywood.

Stephanie Wilkerson, 29, died May 31, 2002, when a strong storm ripped through the West Mifflin amusement park. High winds toppled a pavilion housing The Whip ride. Wilkerson died when she was struck by the collapsing roof and pinned against a metal fence.

A different jury will hear a second trial to determine the liability of Kennywood and the pavilion's builder, Landau Building Co., along with punitive damages.

"The jury will learn how the pavilion was built without engineer-approved architecture, no building permit and how the pillars were not only inadequate but didn't meet the building code," said **Thomas R. Kline**, attorney for the Wilkerson family.

"The next trial will shed public light on what happened and how Kennywood and Landau's conduct led to Stephanie's avoidable death."

Kennywood's attorney, David White, said the event was a tragedy but an accident.

"Everybody's heart goes out to the Wilkerson family," White said. "It was an accident in the truest sense. No matter how it was built, it would have come down with those winds."

The weeklong trial ended yesterday after the jury deliberated about four hours. Wilkerson's parents, Sylvester and Helen, testified earlier in the week.

Kennywood President Peter J. McAneny said the case was divided into two trials, and the first was to determine the amount of a monetary award "if anyone is found liable in the second trial."

"We strongly believe the evidence to be presented in the second trial will show that a natural disaster, i.e. the macroburst or tornado, was the cause of this tragedy," McAneny said in a statement.