

## Detroit News

### Fatal drunken driving case settled

Restaurant comes to terms with kin of three teen victims

By Jennifer Brooks / The Detroit News

**SOUTHFIELD** -- Three grieving families have reached a settlement with the restaurant chain they accuse of serving alcohol to the drunk driver who killed their children.

TGI Friday's and the driver's estate have agreed to pay damages to the parents of Ashley Easterbrook, 18, Andrew Stindt, 19, and Michael Jamieson, 19.

"In the old days, you could tar and feather (wrongdoers), you could hang them in the stocks. Today, all you can do to punish someone is take their money," said Ashley's father, David Easterbrook, adding that all three families will continue to fight to hold restaurants and bars accountable when patrons drive away intoxicated.

"If this helps save lives, then our children will not have died in vain."

The settlement includes a provision that the families not reveal how much money they're getting.

The Troy teens died shortly after midnight on June 3, 1997, when Lori Ann Smith, 33, of Auburn Hills, traveling more than 70 miles an hour, ran a red light and broadsided their car. Smith, whose blood-alcohol level was 0.15 percent -- the legal limit in Michigan is 0.10 percent -- also died.

The teens spent the last night of their lives watching a movie and drinking coffee. They were sober and buckled up when Smith's car plowed into Stindt's 1996 Pontiac Grand Prix at the intersection of Long Lake and Crooks roads.

The settlement came seven days into the trial, after all three families had testified and after their attorney, Geoffrey Fieger, had rested his case. The families contend that Smith spent several hours at TGI Friday's, and accused the staff of continuing to serve her after she became visibly intoxicated.

The Dallas-based restaurant chain maintains it is not to blame.

"Although we have agreed to the settlement, we still believe that (Smith) was not in the restaurant on the night in question, as the evidence would have proven," said Robert Kraus, the company's attorney. "The decision to settle was purely a business decision."

Fieger accused the restaurant chain of promoting "drinking in a party atmosphere."

"As a society, we have to hold corporations that profit from the sale of alcoholic beverages responsible for their actions," Fieger said. "Ashley, Michael and Andrew were victimized by a corporate system that encourages irresponsible drinking."

All three families have established foundations and scholarship funds in the students' memories.

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