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## Judge Awards \$15 Mil. for Teen's Fall in Mine Shaft

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*Of the Legal Staff*

A Philadelphia judge awarded \$13 million in survival damages and \$2 million in wrongful death damages in the case of a teenager who died after falling into a mine shaft during a trip to Mexico.

Philadelphia Common Pleas Court Judge Joseph I. Papalini found in favor of Susan L. Patterson, the administratrix of the estate of Taylor Patterson Crane, and Christopher Crane and against Travel for Teens, of Wayne, Pa., Tuesday, according to the trial worksheet in *Patterson v. Travel for Teens*.

The plaintiffs' counsel was Dominic C. Guerrini of Kline & Specter in Philadelphia.

Defense counsel was Joseph M. Fioravanti in Media, Pa. Fioravanti declined to make any comment on the case.

Taylor Crane, whose parents are Susan Patterson and Christopher Crane of West Chester, Pa., enrolled for a July 2007 trip to Mexico organized by Travel for Teens, the plaintiffs' complaint said.

Travel for Teens entered an oral contract

with Casa de los Angeles, of Homer Glen, Ill., for Casa de los Angeles to arrange a community service trip for Pennsylvania teenagers in exchange for \$10,000, the complaint said. "This trip to Mexico allowed the teenage travelers to work with and mentor allegedly underprivileged Mexican children," the complaint said.

During the trip, 30 American youths and 80 Mexican children went on a field trip to the Cinco Señores Mine in Pozos, Mexico, but no employee of Travel for Teens had visited the locale in which there were abandoned mine shafts, the complaint said.

Travel for Teens alleged that all of the youths on the trip were under the "care and control" of Casa de los Angeles, which "controlled each and every aspect for the group of Pennsylvania teenagers," the complaint said.

In Travel for Teens' pretrial memorandum, the company said "it is true that Travel for



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Teens did not make an advance trip to the location where this incident occurred in order to assess the dangers itself. Instead, it relied upon Casa de los Angeles for the security concerns attendant to this trip."

During a game of tag, Taylor Crane ran toward an abandoned mine shaft, plunging 500 feet to his death, the complaint said.

The mine shaft was not labeled with any warning signs and was not guarded with railings, the complaint said.

According to statements from the Mexican children playing tag with Crane, Crane jumped on the top of what appeared to be a stone wall but was on the edge of the shaft, Guerrini said. Crane tried to get across the shaft and was able to catch hold of a small tree on the side of the shaft, but soon he fell down into the shaft, the attorney said.

During the bench trial, there was "graphic testimony about the nature of his pain and suffering," Guerrini said. "Dr. [Wayne K.] Ross said there was 10 to 15 seconds of horrific suffering right after he released the branch he 'was holding onto' and before making contact

*Fall continues on* **9**

(continued from page 1) with the bottom of the mine shaft.

The judge seemed most interested in the damages, including pain and suffering, Guerrini said.

Guerrini said that Casa de los Angeles was released on preliminary objections because the charity did not conduct business in Philadelphia.

Travel for Teens' carrier, Ace, is disputing that there is insurance coverage for Crane's death, but Guerrini said his firm disputes that there is not coverage.

The defense pretrial memorandum said that its liability insurance was written "inexplicably" so that there was no coverage for events that occurred in a foreign venue. "Under the circumstances, Travel for Teens has discussed the concept of the assignment of the broker's negligence claims to the plaintiffs, in settlement of the claim against Travel for Teens," defense said.

Crane was a "national merit commended scholar," his parents were college-educated and Crane intended to go to college, Guerrini said.

The plaintiffs estimated that Crane's future lost earning capacity ranged from \$1.96 million to \$7.77 million, according to court papers.

"The verdict represents what a special kid Taylor was," Guerrini said. "His family was very committed to service."