

Personal Injury Litigation

COURIER POST

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PHILADELPHIA — A judge on Tuesday threw out felony charges against a nightclub operator and pier owner over a May 2000 pier collapse that killed three women, including two from Cherry Hill, and injured dozens more.

Judge Benjamin Lerner ruled that prosecutors didn't have enough evidence to support felony charges of risking a catastrophe and criminal conspiracy against Pier 34 owner Michael Asbell and Eli Karetny, operator of the Heat nightclub.

Asbell and Karetny still face misdemeanor charges, including three counts of involuntary manslaughter and 43 counts of recklessly endangering another person, but could face less jail time if convicted.

The lesser charges also put the two men in a municipal court trial in front of a judge. If found guilty, they would automatically be entitled to a second trial in Common Pleas court. Prosecutors plan to appeal the ruling, a spokeswoman for the district attorney's office said.

Just after 8 p.m. on May 18, 2000, the east end of the pier, which was full with clubgoers and dinner patrons, collapsed into the chilly Delaware River. Three people ... Jean Ferraro, 27, and Monica Rodriguez, 21, both of Cherry Hill, and DeAnn White, 25, of Philadelphia, all employees of the New Jersey State Aquarium ... were killed. They had been at the nightclub celebrating White's upcoming birthday.

John and Eileen Ferraro, the parents of Jean Ferraro, said they were disappointed with Lerner's ruling. We hope there are still enough charges out there that we will still find out what happened to our girls,(tm) John Ferraro said.