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Settlement could reach \$31 million

Insurance company agrees to pay \$5.25 million in 1998 Route 11 crash injury claim, but payment to Alexander Lacy of Kingston could escalate because it is structured over 46 years.

By **IE MORGAN-BESECKER**
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WILKES-BARRE — The parents of a Kingston teenager who suffered a severe head injury in a car crash have agreed to a settlement that could pay their son more than \$31 million.

The settlement will pay for the medical care of 19-year-old Alexander Lacy, who sustained catastrophic brain damage in a Jan. 16, 1998 crash on U.S. Route 11 in Edwardsville. The crash also killed one person and injured two others.

On Monday an insurance company for Lacy's father, Roger, agreed to pay \$5.25 million for an underinsured motorist claim. But because the payment is structured over 46 years, the total with compounded interest would reach \$31,641,106 should the teenager live to age 65.

"While the money is substantial, no amount of money could ever give back to our son what was taken from him in this terrible accident," Roger Lacy and his wife, Anne, said in a prepared statement.

"Our goal has always been to see that money would not be an obstacle to our son receiving the best care possible. We are deeply comforted by the knowledge we will be able to provide for our son's medical needs for the rest of his life."

The law firm of Rosenn, Jenkins and Greenwald will receive one-third of the total settlement for legal fees. It was unclear Monday if the one-third is

SETTLEMENT

Continued from 1A

76-year-old Leonard Kovaleski of Plymouth. Kovaleski was killed. Rolland and a second passenger, Michael Williams of Kingston, were injured.

Lacy was hospitalized for nearly three months and spent nine months in two rehabilitation centers. He returned to his parents' home in November 1998, where he continues to recuperate, said the Lacys' attorney, Richard Russo.

Russo said Lacy remains confined to a wheelchair. He said the teenager is continuing to progress and is able to speak. He declined to comment further, citing the Lacys' desire for privacy.

"Roger and Anne Lacy are the two strongest, most dedicated parents I've had the pleasure of meeting," Russo said. "May God be with them and their son."

Alexander Lacy, Rolland and Williams were classmates at Wyoming Valley West High School. They were on their way to school when the crash occurred.

Contacted Monday, William Rolland, father of Thomas Rolland, credited the Lacys for the emotional support they have offered his son.

"This has been a devastating experience for everyone involved, but especially for the Lacys. Our prayers have been and will continue to be with them. They are wonderful people."

Roger and Anne Lacy filed suit last year against Presque Isle Insurance of Erie to recover approximately \$7 million in under-

insured motorist coverage they believed they had on several vehicles used in a printing business Roger Lacy co-owned, Russo said. The company previously paid the Lacys \$1 million, but disputed it owed any more.

Underinsured motorist coverage allows a person to recoup medical costs from their own insurance company if the driver who caused their injuries does not have adequate coverage.

Russo said the Lacys argued the insurance policies on each of seven vehicles used in the business should have been combined to pay a cumulative sum, but Presque Isle maintained the vehicles could not be combined.

Following a several-month-long court battle, the company agreed to combine 5 1/4 of the vehicles, with the Lacys agreeing to drop the claim on the other two vehicles. The \$5.2 million payment includes the \$1 million the firm already paid the Lacys, Russo said.

Rolland was insured for \$100,000. Russo said a separate lawsuit against Rolland's insurer is pending.

Despite the suit, Russo said the Lacys hold "no ill will" toward Rolland.

"It's an unfortunate tragedy everybody wishes never happened," he said.

In their statement, the Lacys say they are "forever grateful" to Russo and the Rosem law firm for its efforts to secure the settlement.

"It was their persistence and creativity that made this recovery possible," they said.

Call Morgan-Besecker at 829-7179.

OFFICE

Continued from 1A

ing federal officials, including Congressman Paul Kanjorski, D-Nanticoke.

The latest decision has created a great deal of consternation among residents, she said.

"They simply do not understand how so much could go wrong."

"They don't understand why the Postal Service was not able to secure a new site that satisfied the needs of the customers better than the present location."

VIETNAM

Continued from 1A

tourage, his stern-faced Vietnamese military escorts and a gaggle of reporters and photographers.

Cohen thanked the Vietnamese — who lost an estimated 3 million of their own people during the war — for their cooperation in searching for missing U.S. servicemen. Later, in a Hanoi dinner toast to his Vietnamese hosts, Cohen said the diggers are "seeking to heal the pain of a family who waits on their work."