



Local

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY NEWS

Ex-store manager gets \$1.7 million

Construction firms settle out of court

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Two construction companies on Thursday evening reached a \$1.77 million settlement with a former Vons grocery manager who suffered serious injuries in a fall at the chain's Montecito store during a remodel.

Ventura resident Mark Ryan, 44, claimed that employees of Crabco, a framing contractor, and Kirkley Corp., a general contractor, failed to properly guard a second-floor hole cut for an elevator shaft installation.

Mr. Ryan's lawsuit seeking unspecified monetary damages described his June 24, 2002, tumble, and said the accident caused collapsed lungs, broken ribs and a broken collarbone in addition to a slipped disk and a herniated disk along his spine.

"It's a very good settlement," said his lawyer, Mark Hiepler, who added the accident resulted in \$150,000 in medical bills.

"The pain and suffering component of the award is significant."

Mr. Hiepler said his client can no longer work as a grocery manager due to his inability to lift heavy objects now. He may instead pursue a career in accounting.

Added Mr. Ryan in a prepared statement: "The most difficult thing for me besides the work and medical issues has been my inability to be an active participant in my twin boys' lives.

"I am grateful the matter is over."

The trial, to be heard in the courtroom of Santa Barbara Superior Court Judge Denise de Bellefeuille, was set to begin in February.

Defense lawyers on Friday disputed several of the claims.

"There is no admission of liability in this settlement," said Mark Kirwin, an attorney for Crabco. He said a "temporary barrier" was in fact erected around the hole.

In addition, Mr. Kirwin and Robert Dennison, an attorney for Kirkley Corp., disputed that Mr. Ryan's spine injuries resulted from the accident.

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