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Family of Moncks Corner woman killed in car crash awarded \$3.5 million in suit against driver

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Wanda Holland, 47, of Moncks Corner was killed in a car crash on May 12, 2008. (Photo provided)

Ask 36-year-old Tonya Brumbaugh what the hardest day of this year has been for her and she'll tell you Mother's Day.

A day meant to honor the matriarch has turned into a day of mourning for the Moncks Corner woman and her family. That's because five years earlier, Brumbaugh's mother, 47-year-old Wanda Holland, died in a car crash.

"It was a difficult day (this year). We went to her gravesite with the children and decorated the grave. We always talk about my mom with the kids," she said.

It was midday May 12, 2008, and Holland was headed northbound on Highway 17A when a man's car crossed the center line and crashed head-on into her sports utility vehicle. She later died from her injuries.

The driver of that other car, 42-year-old Chad Wayne Kessing Sr. of Summerville, was not charged by the S.C. Highway Patrol with causing her death.

But this week, a Berkeley County jury found Kessing civilly liable for the crash and ordered him to pay Holland's family \$3.5 million in damages, according to the family's attorney, Mullins McLeod.

During the two-day trial, McLeod presented evidence that Kessing's driver's license had been revoked twice before the crash. At the time of the wreck, he had a beginner's permit, which requires a licensed driver to be in the car at all times. Kessing, who suffered seizures, was driving alone that day, according to McLeod.

"I was surprised that someone like that could actually get out there and drive anyway," Brumbaugh said. The state has since suspended Kessing's driver's license.

"I'm glad he's off the streets," Brumbaugh said.

Kessing's attorney, Margaret Urbanic, did not return two calls to her office and cell phone Wednesday requesting comment. The Post and Courier was unable to reach Kessing.

McLeod said Kessing knew it was unsafe for him to drive but he did so anyway. "The case was really about the loss of a mother and grandmother and whether or not the Moncks Corner community felt strongly about safety on its roadways," he said.

McLeod's co-counsel, attorney Charlie Condon, said he hopes this verdict also sends a clear message to the public about consequences.

"It's important to get the word out that we owe obligations to each other. And anyone who knows they can't safely drive shouldn't be out there. Such a verdict would be a warning to others in a similar situation," he said. Detailed information from the Highway Patrol about the crash and their assessment of the wreck was not available Wednesday. Troop 6 Public Information Officer Bridget Wyant said it would take a few days to pull the file. When asked why the agency did not file criminal charges against Kessing, Wyant said that couldn't be answered until the file was reviewed.

Brumbaugh wouldn't say how she felt about the lack of criminal charges against Kessing. She said she and her sister, 34-year-old Cynthia Malmede, are simply relieved the civil court battle is over. Brumbaugh said she hopes to use some of the money to pay for her children's college.

Her 18-year-old daughter, Ashley Malmede, who just graduated from high school, wants to go to culinary school. "It's awful it happened this way but her dreams are coming true in a horrible way," Brumbaugh said. "I always tell my daughter that her 'Nanaw' would take of her."