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Miami-Dade jury awards \$15 million to family in quintuple-death traffic death

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More than two years after state troopers say he killed five people in a gruesome drunk-driving wreck on Interstate 95 in North Miami-Dade, Carlos Lacayo remains a fugitive.

But that didn't stop a civil jury this week from awarding over \$15 million in damages to the parents of one of the victims.

"He couldn't run away from the civil justice system," said lawyer Edward Blumberg, who is representing the family of victim Emerson Kastenholz.

The Miami-Dade civil jury deliberated about three hours Thursday before reaching its decision in the wrongful death lawsuit.

According to Miami-Dade court documents, Lacayo plowed his mother's gray 2010 Honda Accord into a crowd of motorists on the shoulder of Interstate 95 at Northwest 103rd Street just before 5 a.m. on March 5, 2011.

The motorists had just been involved in a series of minor accidents that started when one car clipped a stalled vehicle parked in the emergency lane.

In all, seven cars were involved. The crowd had gathered on the shoulder to await police when Lacayo's Accord veered from the express lane, smashing into the concrete barrier and plowing through the motorists, according to the Florida Highway Patrol.

Killed instantly in the crash were Kastenholz, 23; Antuan Fernandez Perez, 22; Evidia Rodriguez, 57; and Mirtha Queipo, 48. A fifth person, Ana Belkis Gomez, 38, died five days later at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Kastenholz was a recent University of Miami graduate from Palm Beach County who had been planning to attend graduate school.

According to court documents, Lacayo's blood alcohol content level was 0.127— well above the legal limit of 0.08 — four hours after the crash, after he had been admitted to the hospital.

He reeked of alcohol and admitted to one trooper that he had been drinking at a nightclub earlier in the evening, according to the FHP.

Troopers towed the Accord to a storage yard, where armed with the search warrant, they seized the car's air bags, keys and Lacayo's ID card. The deployed driver's side airbag was spotted with blood,

which troopers believe belonged to Lacayo.

An arrest warrant was later issued charging Lacayo, 26, with five counts of DUI manslaughter and vehicular homicide. But Lacayo had vanished, and remains missing.

He faces up to 75 years in prison if convicted. Lacayo, who held a Florida real estate appraiser trainee license, had no previous criminal history in the state, records show.

The civil lawsuit was filed on behalf of Kastenholz's parents, Michael and Kathleen, each of whom testified about the effects of their son's death.

The judge had already ruled that Lacayo was liable for Kastenholz's death.

Although Lacayo, whose family hails from Nicaragua, remains on the lam, he was represented during the four-day trial by a lawyer hired by his car insurance company. His mother testified at trial that she had no idea where her son is living.

The jury awarded \$9 million to Kastenholz's mother and \$6 million to his father. Jurors awarded an additional \$350,000 in punitive damages.

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