



\$6.6 million awarded in nursing home death suit

By Jim Phillips
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A Smithville woman was awarded \$6.6 million Monday by a Travis County jury that decided a nursing home was grossly negligent in the death of her father in 1990.

ARA Living Centers Inc., which owns about 120 nursing homes in Texas, was ordered to pay \$6 mil-

lion in exemplary damages and \$1.5 million in actual damages for the death of Willie Stasny, 90, who died March 7, 1990, at Bastrop Nursing Center.

"I'm overjoyed," said Ray Chester, who with Kevin Madison represented Stasny's daughter, Pauline Schlitzkus of Smithville. "They actually gave us more than we asked for."

Two jurors said after the trial that the panel considered a punitive award of \$20 million before settling on the lesser figure.

Roy Minton, the attorney for the nursing home, said the verdict would be appealed.

Evidence during the three-week trial indicated that Stasny had fallen at least 23 times during the previous 15 months, and there was

testimony "that he fell at least that many more times that they didn't write down," Chester said.

According to the suit, Stasny fell in the early morning of March 4, but a doctor was not called until the next day. Chester said Stasny suffered a fractured hip and two fractured ribs.

Stasny was admitted to South Austin Medical Center, but was in

shock, had a body temperature of 90 degrees and died on March 7, Chester said.

Chester said the nursing home was cited by the Texas Department of Health for not notifying the doctor sooner and said there had been similar violations by ARA nursing homes in the past.

After the verdict, Schlitzkus said, "I had confidence in the

jury."

Asked what effect she hoped the verdict would have, she replied: "I wish it would change (the nursing home) from what it is so it wouldn't happen to anyone else."

Stacy Adams, administrator of the Bastrop facility, said, "I'm kind of in a state of shock. I'm devastated. I think we run a really good nursing home."