

Jury Awards \$535,000 to Worker Who Lost Fingers

By Julie Ridenour

A punch press operator, who lost four fingers in a 1976 industrial accident, will receive \$535,000 from the firm which sold the machine to his company.

Carmelo Rios, 40, of Stanton, had the four fingers of his right hand instantly severed when the safety device on his punch press failed. The accident occurred at Greenville Products, a Montcalm County refrigerator manufacturer.

Rios alleged that Wilko Industrial Systems and Sales, a now-bankrupt Grand Rapids industrial sales company, failed to properly instruct Greenville Products on the use of the safety device.

He also contended that Wilko failed to advise the manufacturer about the dangers of the device.

Although Rios can no longer work as a press operator, he continues to work at the manufacturing site as a parts degreaser.

Rios, a volunteer fireman for 16 years, was forced to quit the department he had served because the injuries prevented him from holding the fire hose or driving a firetruck.

After interest and costs are assessed, Rios' initial judgment of \$400,000 will total more than \$535,000, according to Keary Sawyer, his attorney.

"I think it was a fair recovery for him. It (the

accident) has changed his whole life. He's a person who works with his hands," said Sawyer.

"I don't think that it's a large verdict considering the types of injuries that were suffered. The injuries affect him every day in almost every way."

A six-member jury deliberated less than two hours Friday before returning the verdict, which is one of the largest product liability verdicts delivered in Kent County.

According to Sawyer, the judgment will be covered by liability insurance held by the defunct Wilko Industrial Sales at the time of the accident.

Circuit Court Judge George Boucher was on the bench.