

# Jury awards \$3.27 million in car fatality

## Norwich police dispatcher died in 1993 crash

By KATHLEEN EDGEComb  
Day Staff Writer

A jury awarded the family of a man killed in a 1993 car accident \$3.27 million Thursday following a weeklong trial in New London Superior Court.

It is the largest jury verdict in a wrongful death case in the history of New London County, according to the attorney for the estate of James Loftis.

Loftis, a 22-year-old civilian dispatcher, was headed for work at the Norwich Police Department on Oct. 25, 1993, when his car was struck head-on on Route 85 in Salem.

Brian Whitlatch, 26, of Salem, was charged three months later with negligent homicide with a motor vehicle.

Police said his car crossed into oncoming traffic on Route 85 and hit Loftis' car.

Loftis was taken by Life Star helicopter to Hartford Hospital, where he died Oct. 26, 1993, from head and chest injuries.

Police said neither drugs nor alcohol played a role in the accident.

Andrea Loftis of Salem sued

Whitlatch in March 1994, alleging Whitlatch was responsible for her husband's death.

Thomas Mulaney of Glastonbury, Whitlatch's lawyer, could not be reached for comment.

Mrs. Loftis issued a statement Thursday through her lawyer, Robert I. Reardon Jr. of New London, saying, "I'm so happy that the jury recognizes the value of my husband's life. He was a wonderful husband and father, and everybody who knew him liked him. My family feels vindicated."

She declined to comment further.

After two days of deliberation, the jury awarded \$1,145,000 for Loftis' lost-earning capacity, and \$2 million for the loss of his ability to live out the rest of his life.

Mrs. Loftis, 22, who has a 4-year-old son, also was awarded \$125,000 for the loss of her husband's companionship.

"This is no runaway verdict. This is a justice verdict," Reardon said. "Through no fault of his own, he was wrongfully killed."

In March, Whitlatch was accepted into a special probation program in which the criminal charges will be dropped when he fulfills the terms of the probation.

At Mrs. Loftis' request, a judge ordered Whitlatch to talk to students at local high schools about the dangers of not paying attention when driving. Reardon said the 30 hours of community service will be fulfilled during the next year.