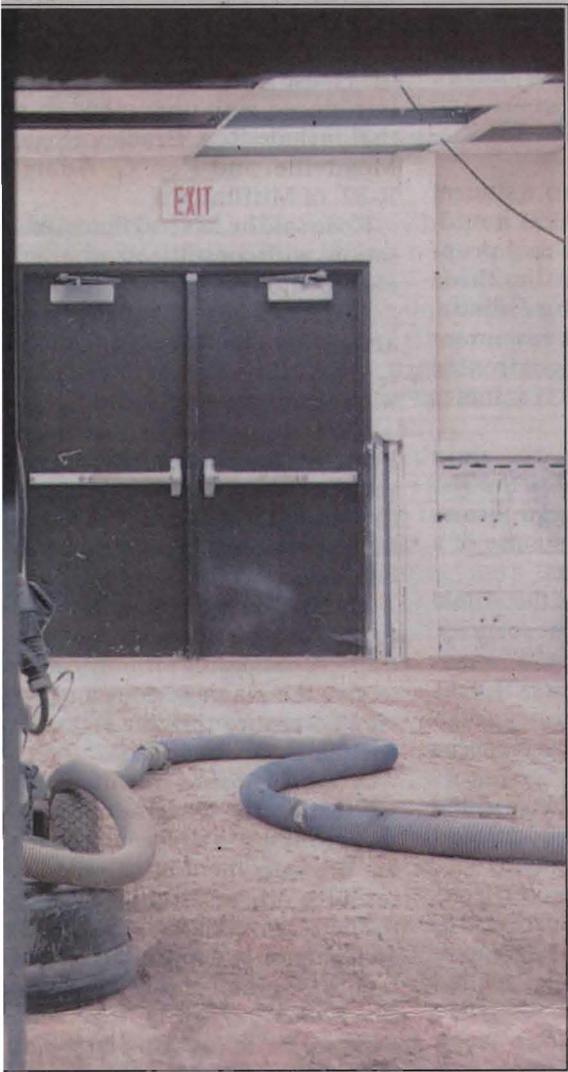


DAMAGED BUILDING ect school



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

ville Middle School classroom that is being
r 2011. The school's 500 students have been
the building 16 months ago. Story, Page B1.

Hunter left blind gets \$4M judgment

By Evamarie Socha
The Daily Item

LEWISBURG — A former assistant football coach in Mifflinburg, blinded by an errant shotgun blast while turkey hunting in May 2010, and his wife were awarded more than \$4 million in Union County Court on Thursday for injuries, lost earnings and pain and suffering.

It now is a matter of whether Michael and Terry Hobbins, of New Berlin, will collect any of the money from the judgment, their attorney said.

The couple filed a civil lawsuit in October 2010 against

INSIDE



Injured firefighter has received \$0 from \$10M judgment against arsonist/A3

Leroy Miller, of Mifflinburg, who is incarcerated at the State Correctional Institution at Greene County in Waynesburg, where he is serving a sentence for previous and unrelated charges.

Union-Snyder Judge Michael Hudock made the award of \$4,034,000 after more than two hours of testimony, most of it tearful, from the Hobbinses about

the once-active life Michael led before the accident that left him blind, suffering from ocular and brain trauma and

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Teenage driver faces homicide

Hunter receives \$4M

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extensive scarring. Experts also testified on behalf of the Hobbinses.

The Hobbinses' attorney, D. Joseph Chapman, of Schmidt Kramer in Harrisburg, said the couple was pleased with the outcome and holds no grudges.

"They got recognition from an independent person that says what they've been through was really worth something," he said.

The award equals \$1,034,000 for lost income, \$2 million for suffering and \$1 million in punitive damages.

"I think (Hudock) was upset that this guy should never have had a gun, shouldn't have been in the woods, (that) this shouldn't have happened," Chapman said.

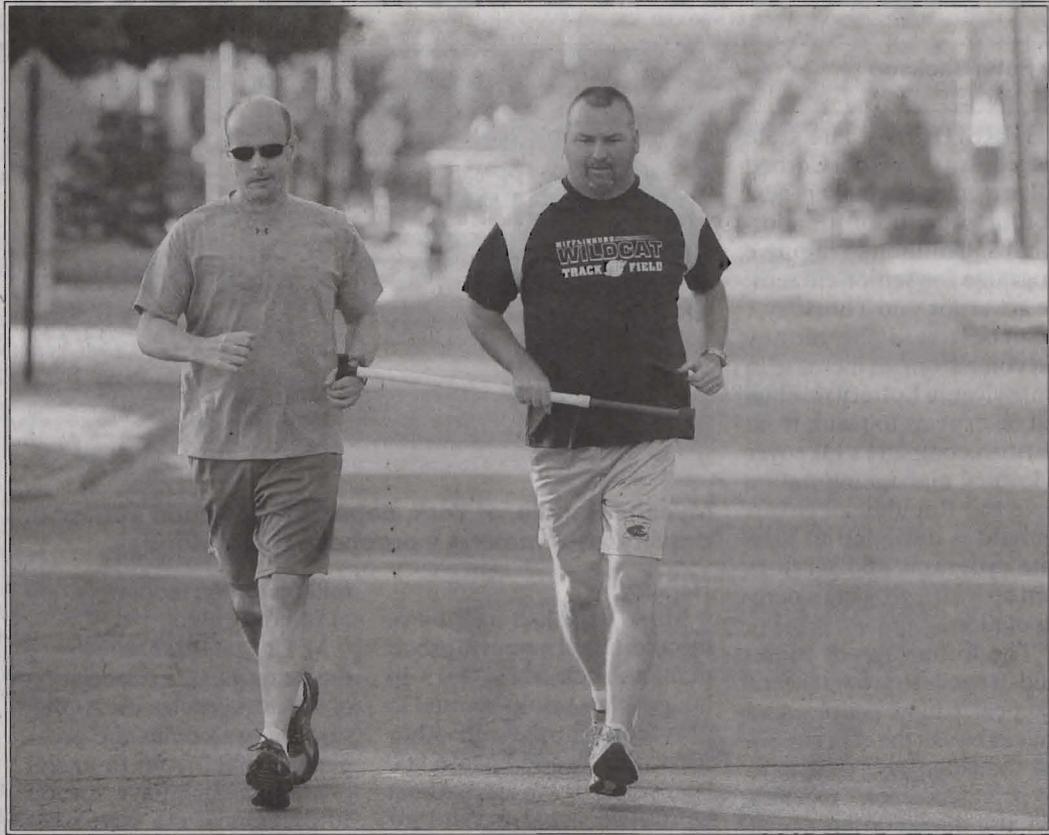
Miller was barred from having a firearm because of a previous drug conviction. Union County officials revoked his probation after the hunting accident.

A criminal docket for Miller states that he has been at SCI-Greene since June 8 on charges from a 2007 drunken driving incident that included driving without a license and attempting to flee an officer.

A burden

Hobbins, 51, told the court how his life essentially was turned upside-down by the accident and his injuries. Pausing several times as he choked back tears, Hobbins spoke how he enjoyed his job, liked hunting and fishing with the couple's sons, once ran several miles five times a week and coached football in Mifflinburg.

Now, "I feel like a burden," he said, clutching his blind



File photo/The Daily Item

Michael Hobbins, left, trains with friend Darryl Chappell for the Mifflinburg July 4 5-K race in this July 2011 file photo.

walking cane. His wife is his guide for most things, he said, and he loathes that the cannot do regular household tasks, like mowing the lawn or making repairs.

Chapman thought that Hudock was particularly moved when Michael Hobbins said his daughter Amber, 28, recently became engaged, and "instead of me walking her down the aisle, she'll be walking me," he said through tears. "I won't be able to see her in her wedding gown."

Hudock himself has been a father of the bride three times, and understands the meaning of that moment, Chapman said.

Terry Hobbins also spoke of how life is different. Beside their income being cut in half and the loss of benefits and independence, "He was

very active before," she said. "Now he does a lot of sitting in a chair, listening to television or the radio."

Michael Hobbins becomes moody and depressed at times, she said, and angry.

Chapman said it's "not very likely" that the Hobbinses will see much, if any, of the judgment.

"We'll watch and see what happens with this fellow's life," he said of Miller, 45.

If there is no appeal of the verdict in the next 10 days, "We then wait until he gets out of prison," Chapman said, though he wasn't sure when that would be.

Miller was never represented in court, which Chapman said is very unusual.

"But it's one of those things ... you have two decisions to make as the plaintiff's lawyer:

Do I follow through when there is likely no money, or do we let it rock and roll and tell them I don't think we can do anything?" Chapman said, adding his firm felt strongly about seeing the Hobbinses' case through.

"We wanted to make sure we gave the Hobbinses the opportunity to make their case," he said.

Also testifying were Dirk Remensnyder, wildlife conservation officer for the north central region of the Pennsylvania Game Commission, who was the investigating officer, and Dr. Shawn McGlaughlin, a primary care physician at Evangelical Community Hospital who treats Hobbins.

■ Email comments to esocha@dailyitem.com