

**DOES YOUR DOCTOR WASH HER HANDS ENOUGH?**

**A NEW STUDY SAYS NOT EVEN CLOSE | STORY, PAGE 6A**

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 | Let's get into it.

# 'TO KNOW IT WASN'T ALL HER FAULT MEANS EVERYTHING'

For five years the parents of the driver of this Grand Am read reports that their daughter was at fault in an accident that killed her and two passengers. Now a jury has decided the truck driver was mostly at fault and awarded the families \$20.2 million. | **PAGE 3A**



Christina Chakonas, 17, was the driver of the car.



Diana Kakidas, 17



Adam McDonald, 17



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# \$20 mil. for teens' families

**'VINDICATION' | Jury rules truck driver at fault in 2002 crash that killed three 17-year-olds**

BY STEVE PATTERSON

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The car full of teenage boys and the car full of teenage girls pulled beside each other that Fourth of July weekend.

Somebody smiled.

Names were traded.

Plans were made.

First, they'd watch fireworks. Then they would finish the night at a dance club.

But within hours, half of them were dead.

One car full of kids made it across the intersection of a rural Indiana highway. The other, trailing behind, didn't.

Crossing their path was a tractor-trailer which, attorneys said, was speeding and driven by a man with a history of falsifying his driving logs, who had already exceeded the number of hours he could legally drive that week.

The family of the driver of the Pontiac Grand Am — Christina Chakonas, 17 — anguished over whether media reports were true.

"The initial stories said 'Girl pulls out in front of truck, three die and it's all her fault,'" said attorney Michael Muldoon. "This family was living with that for five years."

On Friday, a Cook County jury decided the trucker was mostly at fault in the July 6, 2002, accident and awarded \$20.2 million to the families of the three dead teenagers — two girls who were best friends and a boy they'd met only by chance.

## Defendants plan to appeal

The families of Diana Kakidas, 17, of St. John, Ind., and Adam McDonald, 17, of Lansing, each got \$8 million.

Christina's family, of Dyer, Ind., was awarded \$4.2 million, after jurors found her 40 percent responsible.

"This was so important to me — this is vindication for my daughter," Al Chakonas said between sobs. "I miss her so much. And she was vin-



Three teenagers in this Pontiac Grand Am died when their car was hit by a semi on a rural Indiana road in 2002. Truck driver Jaime Reeves, who did not have a stop sign, did not hit his brakes until 3 seconds after the crash on U.S. 30, jurors learned.

icated. To know it wasn't all her fault means everything."

Attorneys for Dean Foods, driver Jaime Reeves, of DeKalb, and his trucking firm, Alco of Wisconsin, say they will appeal the verdict.

"What the jury did was extremely unjust," said attorney Alton Haynes, who contends Christina didn't fully stop before going through the intersection and might not have had her headlights on.

But jurors also learned Reeves, who didn't have a stop sign, didn't hit his brakes until 3 seconds after the crash happened along U.S. 30 in Wanatah, Ind., an indicator he was tired or not paying attention, Muldoon said.

"Accountability was important to



Christina Chakonas



Diana Kakidas



Adam McDonald

each of these families," said attorney Martin Healy, representing the Kakidas and McDonald families. "These were three great kids from three great families."

Even five years later, those "three

great families," and even those kids in the first car, still ask why fate chose some, but not others.

After the fireworks and on the way to the club that night, Adam asked to ride with Christina and Di-

ana, swapping seats with a friend of theirs, who then got in the other car with his friends.

Christina's father said he made sure she knew the rules of the road and to always drive safely.

No drugs or alcohol were in anyone's systems.

The girls were preparing for their senior year at Lake Central High School in St. John, Ind., where they were on the dance team.

Adam balanced school and sports at Thornton Fractional South High School in Lansing with caring for his ill grandmother.

"They were just a bunch of nice kids out doing what they're supposed to do when you're kids," Muldoon said. "It was a horrible tragedy."