

JOHNSON COUNTY

Couple gets \$5.5 million settlement from trucking company in I-35W wreck

Mary and John Reutter were seriously injured in the multivehicle accident.

By **MARTHA DELLER**
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A couple seriously injured last year when a tanker truck hit their car on Interstate 35W near Burleson have received a \$5.5 million settlement from the Oklahoma company that owns the truck.

Mary and John Reutter received the settlement after a mediation conference last month between their attorney and those representing United Petroleum Transports.

"This will ensure that my clients are compensated for their injuries for the rest of their lives," said William Berenson, the Fort Worth attorney representing the Reutters.

Donna Ferolito, who was also injured in the multivehicle collision on June 13, 2006, received a separate, undisclosed settlement.

The settlements ended a lawsuit filed in July 2006 in 249th District Court in Johnson County.

The Reutters, who moved to Michigan after the wreck, said Monday that they are pleased with the settlement, which was nearly 10 times the amount of their medical bills. But they said they would rather have good health than the money; both live with pain and disabling injuries nearly

18 months after the wreck.

Mary Reutter, who was driving the couple's 2002 Mustang at the time, has a paralyzed left arm and only 40 percent mobility in her right arm. She is unable to dress herself, drive a car or even hold her 4-month-old granddaughter.

John Reutter closed his private investigation firm to care for his wife and because of his back injuries.

"Money compensates, but it still doesn't take care of the loss of our life and the pain we've had to endure," he said. "We'd give this all back if we just had our health back."

Ferolito, whose Toyota RAV4 crumpled to less than half its size in the wreck, settled with United Petroleum this summer.

Her attorney, Byron Boenig of Bellaire, declined to divulge the amount. Boenig said that Ferolito is recovering from her injuries, which included pelvic, wrist and jaw fractures, a lacerated liver and a ruptured spleen.

"She is up. She is mobile," he said. "She seems to be making — not a perfect recovery because a lot has happened to her, but she is recovering."

Karl Koen, a Dallas attorney who represented United Petroleum and its driver Ismael Villarreal, said they are glad that the case has been settled.

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