

A report to clients and attorneys.
VOLUME 08 - NUMBER 3

OF COUNSEL

\$3.9 Million Settlement: School Bus Rams Into Van Causing Severe Spinal Injuries to Firefighter/Coach



On December 15, 2005, Vince Merriweather was sitting at a red light at the intersection of Forest Hill

Boulevard and Olympia Boulevard, in Palm Beach County, Florida. He was driving home Altavious Carter, a basketball player at Summit Christian School. Unknown to Vince, Dennis W. Grantham was driving a Palm Beach County School District school bus westbound on Forest Hill Boulevard, approaching Vince at a speed of 45 to 50 miles per hour. For some unknown reason, Mr. Grantham drove the 20,000-pound bus into the rear of Vince's Chevrolet conversion van.

Vince Merriweather was 41 years old, a firefighter and coach of boys basketball at Summit Christian School. His great passion in life was to help young men get a college education. Vince was single and athletic.

Following the accident, Vince was airlifted to Delray Medical Center with decreased sensation in all his extremities. MRIs performed on December 15 and 16 showed spinal cord contusions at C3 and C6-7, a disc disruption at C6-7 with bone injury at C6-7, encroachment of bone into the spinal canal at C6 and C7, disruption of the posterior longitudinal ligament and ligamentum nuchai at C6-7. Vince was transferred to St. Mary's Medical Center on December 19, 2005, where he was admitted to the intensive care unit and treated by Clay Baynham, M.D., a specialist in spinal injuries.

On December 24, 2005, Vince was transferred to St. Mary's Rehabilitation Institute. After a prolonged course of rigorous rehabilitation, Vince was discharged on April 6, 2006.



Trial was scheduled to begin on September 15, 2008. **Chris Searcy** and **David White** were prepared to try this case. Mediation occurred on August 5, 2008, and negotiations continued. A settlement was reached on August 25, 2008, and approved by the Palm Beach County School District on September 7, 2008. The settlement requires payment of \$100,000 in cash, and a Special Claims Bill to be submitted to the Florida Legislature in the amount of \$3.9 million. The School District will not contest the settlement. ■

A 20,000 pound school bus going 45 to 50 miles per hour rammed into the rear of a stopped vehicle. Severe spinal injuries were sustained by the driver of the van, a healthy, athletic 41-year-old firefighter and school coach. Vince Merriweather spent almost a year overcoming his injuries and undergoing rigorous rehabilitation. After mediation, a settlement was reached requiring payment of \$100,000 in cash and a Special Claims Bill to be submitted to the Florida Legislature for the remaining \$3.9 Million in damages.

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