

COPLAN+CRANE CHRONICLES

SPRING SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION

Playing baseball, softball, lacrosse, and other spring sports is a great experience for young athletes.

But it's important to take steps to prevent injuries.

Here are a few tips to help them stay healthy.



Take part in warm-ups + stretching exercises before playing.



Wear proper safety equipment (such as helmets, knee and elbow pads + mouth guards.)



Inspect field conditions. Safe surfaces decrease the risk of non-contact injuries, such as ankle sprains or ACL tears.



Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water.



Take one day off each week to give the body a chance to rest.

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COPLAN + CRANE ANNOUNCES OPENING OF NEW OFFICE IN ROCKFORD

As of May 1, Coplan + Crane will have a new location in Rockford to serve the residents of Winnebago County. The new office is located at One Court Place and will be open Wednesdays and by appointment.

Opening an office in Rockford was a natural progression for the firm, says **Ben Crane**.

Ben notes the opportunity to move into the space came at the right time and that the office is in a great location – across the street from the courthouse.

“Being so close to the courthouse is definitely a plus,” he says. “That will certainly help us as we prepare cases for clients in Winnebago County.”

He said the firm has several cases set for trial in Rockford in the coming months.

“We’ve built some really good relationships with families out there, as well as good relationships with other attorneys,” Ben says. “So it only made sense to get some office space.”

Attorneys from Coplan + Crane have handled more than a hundred cases in Rockford since the firm was founded in 2005. Two of those cases were record-setting.

In one case, a newborn suffered a birth injury at St. Anthony Medical Center, leaving him with a severely disabling form of cerebral palsy. The family was repre-

sented in a medical malpractice lawsuit by **Kevin Burke** and Ben Crane, who argued that hospital staff failed to recognize the baby was in a breech position, failed to recognize signs of fetal distress and failed to deliver him via Caesarian section in a timely way.

The case was settled in 2009 for \$12 million – the largest reported settlement of any medical malpractice case in Winnebago County.

In another case, a car driven by a 64-year-old Freeport woman was rear-ended by a freight truck while stopped in traffic on Route 20 in Rockford. She was killed instantly. Ben Crane, **Stephen Blecha** and **Blake Vance** represented the family in a wrongful death lawsuit. They presented evidence that the driver had fallen asleep moments before the crash and argued that the trucking company failed to provide proper supervision and training.

A jury agreed and awarded the family \$15 million – a record verdict in Winnebago County.

Other big results the firm has obtained for Rockford clients include \$2.75 million for a man injured by a train, and \$1.75 million in a physical therapy malpractice case.

Though the office is new, Ben stressed that



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COPLAN + CRANE ANNOUNCES OPENING OF NEW OFFICE IN ROCKFORD (CONTINUED)

most things won't change. Clients can still expect attentive service from all staff members. They can also expect representation from honest, hardworking, results-driven lawyers who are committed to helping them get the best possible outcome.

Coplan + Crane's main office is in Oak Park and there is also a location in Chicago, but Ben says the firm has been thinking

about adding a Rockford office for some time.

"It's a community that has a need for a law firm with our specialization," Ben says. "Many of the people we serve are severely injured or in bad financial situations, and it's not easy for them to come to Oak Park. Opening this new office is just a way for us to better serve our clients." ■

CRASH RECONSTRUCTION IS VITAL TO A SUCCESSFUL CASE OUTCOME

This article is part three of a four-part series.

In previous issues, we have discussed the case of Sarah Kamp, a 32-year-old pregnant mother who was killed in a car accident involving a downed stop sign at an intersection in German Valley. Coplan + Crane represented Sarah's husband in a wrongful death suit against Stephenson County, arguing that the county was negligent by failing to replace the sign.

In a case like this, it's important to reconstruct the crash to learn more about how it happened. Each side consulted an accident reconstruction expert. Both experts agreed on many details about the crash. But there was significant disagreement concerning perception and reaction time.

"Basically, the question is when you perceive something as a potential threat or danger, how long does it take you to react to it?" says **Ben Crane**, who worked on the case with **Stephen Blecha**.

The lawyers for Stephenson County argued that even though the stop sign was down, Sarah still had enough visual cues to alert her that an intersection was approaching. They were claiming that she could have slowed down or come to a complete stop in time to avoid a collision.

One of the visual cues cited was a "Stop Ahead" sign several hundred feet before the intersection. During pretrial testimony, the county's expert used photographs of the road as evidence that Sarah should have realized an intersection was just ahead.

Our expert noted that the situation was much more complicated than that.

"He did a fantastic job of explaining that going frame by frame through photographs is not an accurate representation of what the actual driver is seeing," says Stephen. "He also pointed out that if you see a 'Stop Ahead' sign, you aren't looking for an intersection. You are looking for that big red sign."

There were farms on each side of the road, and the corn was high enough to obscure Sarah's view. We also brought up the fact that the intersection had been the site of previous accidents.

"They had a series of incidents over the years, to the point where one of the 911 operators described it as a dangerous intersection," says Stephen. "Even when the stop sign was up, this intersection was dangerous."

Ben and Stephen are confident that the testimony from our expert was a significant factor in convincing Stephenson County to settle the case before it reached trial. Our client accepted a settlement offer of \$3 million.

Though no fault was found, Ben hopes the outcome sends a message to local governments facing similar situations.

"Trying to find something the driver may have done wrong is really missing the big picture," says Ben. "Which is that drivers rely on public entities to make sure that traffic safety devices are in place." ■



Look for part four of this story, Cell Phones & Distracted Driving, in the upcoming Summer 2019 newsletter.

\$165,000 SETTLEMENT FOR INJURED TEACHER

In most cases we handle at Coplan + Crane, we are simply trying to help hard-working people who were hurt through no fault of their own.

Our client, Stephanie, was driving down a main road in an Illinois county. A county employee, driving a car owned by the county, suddenly turned left into a side street and crashed into her vehicle.

Stephanie suffered a concussion and post-traumatic concussion syndrome, which caused her problems for several months. She also suffered a herniated disc in her neck, which needed treatment and may require surgery in the future. Her vehicle was totaled.

The employee admitted fault, but the county questioned the extent of the damages Stephanie suffered and challenged her claim.

A trial date was set. **Erv Nevitt** represented Stephanie and prepared to fight for her in court. Two days before the trial was set to begin, the county agreed to pay her \$165,000 in a settlement.



Erv notes that many people wouldn't have been working right after this type of accident, but Stephanie, a Montessori school teacher, insisted on going to work despite her injuries.

"There's a specific set of kids that she has been teaching for years, as in all Montessori schools," Erv says. "She didn't want to miss time and be away from those kids."

Stephanie still has some issues related to the herniated disc she suffered but we are pleased to have been able to help her recover financial compensation so she can get the treatment she needs to continue doing the work she loves. ■

FIRM HAPPENINGS



Coplan + Crane was proud to sponsor "Oak-Leyden Unmasked," a fund-raiser for Oak-Leyden Developmental Services, to support programs and services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. The event was held on February 1 at Carnivale in Chicago.

Good Day Chicago anchor Natalie Bomke served as Mistress of Ceremonies for the evening. Live entertainment included a performance by Voices of Oak-Leyden, a choir composed entirely of adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The event also featured a Latin fusion meal, a silent auction and raffle prizes.

Several staff members from the firm were in attendance and enjoyed a fun night out while supporting a great cause! ■



Coplan + Crane was also a sponsor of "Gavels & Grooves," a fund-raiser for the Pro Bono Network, to support legal services for people in need. The event was held on March 9 at Wire in Berwyn. Entertainment was provided by local recording artist NYLA.

Raffle items included offerings from Oak Park Jewelers, School of Rock Oak Park, Todd & Holland Tea Merchants, The Book Table, Giordano's Pizza and Delia's Kitchen.

All proceeds from the event will help provide legal representation to low income individuals in Cook and DuPage counties. ■

Attorneys from Coplan + Crane attended "Spirit Gala," the 28th annual Notre Dame Dinner Auction to raise funds for Notre Dame College Prep. The event was held April 13 at the Chateau Ritz in Niles.



Kevin Burke

Kevin Burke serves as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the school. The Catholic secondary school for boys focuses on preparing students to be lifelong learners and to lead lives of integrity.

More than 300 people were in attendance. After dinner, a live band provided music for dancing. The event also included a live auction, silent auction and raffle prizes, allowing winners to take home items such as trips, golf outings and tickets for sporting events.

Longtime faculty member Father Richard Conyers was also honored, and received the inaugural Spirit of Notre Dame award. ■

...SPOTLIGHT...

GERA-LIND KOLARIK, is the founder of Evidence Video, a company that has created compelling video presentations for Coplan + Crane to help recover maximum compensation for clients who have suffered life-changing injuries.

After an award-winning career in television news, Gera-Lind was contacted by a lawyer in 1989. He asked if she could take video of his client, who had been left a quadriplegic after an accident. Gera-Lind said the experience opened her eyes to the difficulties people with disabilities face.

“Nobody else was doing this in Chicago at the time,” she says.

Typically, a film crew from Evidence Video will follow an injured client from morning till night. They



document the client’s living conditions, requirements for special care and difficulties with daily tasks. The footage is then edited into a 15- to 30-minute video.

Gera-Lind notes that Ben Crane and Greg Coplan were among the first lawyers in the area to recognize the value of video presentations.

She proudly notes that despite numerous challenges, not one of the company’s videos has been dismissed as evidence.

“People ask, ‘don’t you get depressed doing this?’” she says. “I tell them no, because these videos are helping people who have been hurt.”

Gera-Lind lives in Chicago. She is involved in Catholic Charities and serves on the board of Ignatia House. She is also the author of three best-selling true crime books and several plays. ■

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