

LOCAL **\$2.5M settlement in underage drinking case**

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 By Ben Bradley**February 11, 2009 (WLS) -- A suburban woman has been ordered to pay \$2.5 million in a civil lawsuit.**

Lauralee Pfeifer allegedly allowed teens to drink alcohol in her home prior to a crash that left one teen paralyzed.

The victim's attorney says the case should be a warning to all parents.

The mother who was home said she didn't know her daughter's friends had smuggled beer into the house.

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And, despite new get-tough laws, prosecutors in Lake County chose not to charge her with wrongdoing.

But the parents are still paying a price.

Their insurance company has agreed to a \$2.5 million dollar settlement.

November 19th 2006. George Baldwin had to deal with the aftermath of an afternoon of drinking by a handful of north suburban teenagers.

"It's drastically effected my life," said Baldwin.

George Baldwin was 19 at the time. He was dating a 16 year-old girl who lives in Lake Forest. Together, with a few friends, police say the teens gathered in an upstairs bedroom and began downing beers.

The girl's mother, Lauralee Pfeifer, contends she had no idea the teens were drinking. When the girl's father came home and discovered it, he ordered the boys to leave.

"It's tough to get through every day. You

wake up every morning like 'wow, this is so much different,'" said Baldwin.

Spinal chord damage left George Baldwin paralyzed, likely for life. Although he was 19 at the time -- and legally an adult -- his attorney successfully argued that George's former girlfriend's mom had a duty to prevent the other minor children at the home from drinking and not doing so, led to the accident.

"The message is very clear that public policy in Illinois is going towards zero tolerance...Parents should have zero tolerance in allowing underage drinking at their home," said Patrick Salvi, Baldwin's attorney.

Michael Borders, an attorney for the homeowner, told ABC 7, "In the law these are adults responsible for their own actions. At some point they have to take responsibility for the fact they were drinking and driving."

The parents, in this case, have lost one \$2.5 million dollar civil case and are facing another.

In 2007, another North Shore couple, Jeffrey and Sara Hutsell, were criminally charged and Mr. Hutsell was even sentenced to two weeks in jail after an underage drinking party in their Deerfield home ended with a drunk driving crash that killed two.

George Baldwin's attorney won't let him talk about the events of that night but clearly there have been lessons learned.

"Watch your decisions. Your decision really effect your life," said Baldwin.

George Baldwin was the passenger in the car. The driver, a 19-year-old was convicted of driving under the influence. He is the next target of a lawsuit.

The homeowner's attorney says it's the insurance company that urged a settlement and the homeowner's are not admitting any wrongdoing.

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