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\$15 million award in jetliner crash

Courts • A federal jury awarded \$15 million to the children of an Orange County couple killed when a Singapore Airlines jetliner crashed in Taiwan. **Local 5**

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Investigation • A man is charged with stealing a physician's identity to get a job at a clinic. **Local 7**

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Children of pair killed in plane crash get \$15 million

Orange County couple died in Singapore Airlines accident in Taiwan.

By JEFF ROWE
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A federal court jury in Los Angeles on Friday awarded \$15 million to the children of an Orange County couple killed when a Singapore Airlines jetliner crashed on a Taiwan runway in October 2000.

Richard and Jeannie Ching Ying Wu of Orange were executives at Ameripeec Inc., a Buena Park company that bottles fruit juices and teas for several different brands. The couple had secured \$35 million from the parent company to expand in California.

"No dollar amount will replace our parents," said Sidney Wu of Irvine, a food-manufacturing consultant. "You never really expect anything like this to happen. I never thought we would lose our parents – they were in the prime of their lives." Richard was 58; his wife, 56.

Sidney's sister, Christina Wu, is a corporate attorney who lives in Newport Coast. "Justice was served," she said.

Their attorney, Brian Panish, said the verdict "sends a message to Singapore Airlines that they delayed long enough and should compensate all the victims that they've been putting off for four years." Panish represents 12 more in the case, either families of those who died or people who were hurt. The airline settled one case with a Panish client before the Wu trial began; he said the amount of that agreement is confidential. The Wu case was the first such litigation to be tried in the United States against Singapore Airlines.

Executives from the airline couldn't be reached for comment after the verdict, but the carrier's lawyer said in court that the case wasn't about loss or blame but about how much each family should receive. After the crash, the airline cov-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WU FAMILY

SETTLEMENT: Richard and Jeannie Wu of Orange were executives at Ameripeec, a Buena Park fruit juice and tea bottler.

ered mortuary and burial expenses for the victims and offered to pay \$425,000 to relatives of the 83 dead, nine of them with Orange County connections. In all, 96 survived the crash, but two-thirds of those were hurt.

The Wus boarded their flight to Los Angeles in Taipei, Taiwan, as a typhoon approached the island. The Boeing 747 pushed back from the gate in torrential rain. The pi-

California's wrongful death law allows families to seek damages for the loss of 11 parental attributes, including comfort, love and care. Attorneys for the Wu children asked the jury to award the family \$2 million for each element.

The case began Tuesday, a day of special importance to the family because it was the birthday of both Sidney and his mother. Jurors deliberated for about four hours Thursday, and continued until late afternoon Friday.

Richard and Jeannie Wu immigrated to California from Taiwan and rose to leading positions in Ameripeec; Jeannie was president; Richard as chief financial officer.

Now, Christina and Sidney are considering how they will spend the settlement.

"Our parents came from Taiwan without much," said Christina. "They stressed the importance of giving back."

She and her brother said they are thinking about some way to do just that, especially in education, something their parents stressed. "We want to benefit the community in their name," said Sidney.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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"Our parents came from Taiwan without much. They stressed the importance of giving back."

CHRISTINA WU
DAUGHTER

lots turned onto a closed runway and started their takeoff roll. Seconds later, the jet rammed into construction equipment, ripped apart and burst into flames.

Taiwanese investigators said the pilots could have prevented the accident if they had used airport navigation charts or requested taxi assistance. The company said in 2002 that two of the pilots on the flight had been fired and a third was grounded.

The Los Angeles jury deliberated for a day and a half before returning its verdict in the Wu case. The seven-member panel awarded \$3.75 million for the loss of each parent, or a total of \$7.5 million to each of the children.