

Bike crash settlement

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tops \$1 million

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STAFF WRITER

A Torrance man who was severely injured in a bicycle crash five years ago will receive more than \$1 million to settle a lawsuit with the city, a home developer and two subcontractors.

Watt Homes will pay \$500,000 to James Geibel to end the lawsuit, filed in Torrance Superior Court. The city will add \$350,000, while two subcontractors have agreed to pay \$185,000 collectively.

Although Geibel has somewhat recovered, he has little use of his hands and walks with a stiff gait. A pump, which has to be replaced every four years, was placed in his stomach to feed medicine to his spinal column.

Geibel, 31 at the time of the Jan. 2, 1988, accident, was hospitalized for four months and out of work for a year. He has returned to his auditing

job with a local branch of the General Accounting Office on a part-time basis.

His attorney, Larry Booth, said the settlement was an "excellent" one for his client, because most of the accident's blame rests with the maker of the three-speed bike. The Australian bike manufacturer, Junior Werke, went out of business long ago.

Geibel is happy with the settlement of the case, scheduled for trial this week, Booth said. "He understands the bike was the primary culprit."

Greason Haworth, the attorney for Watt Homes, declined comment.

"We don't think it's obvious that the city is liable," said City Attorney John L. Fellows III. "But the difficulty is it is a city street."

Geibel was riding to the market on Maple Avenue near Plaza del Amo when his 15-year-old bike ran over two water-valve covers, sticking 1½ to 2 inches above a dirt patch in the asphalt. The patch should have been filled in, making the covers and sur-

rounding area nearly flush with the roadway.

The bicyclist did not immediately fall. But about 50 feet after he ran over the valves, the bicycle frame leading from the handlebars to the bike's forks gave way — sending Geibel tumbling.

The attorneys for Torrance and Geibel agreed that the bike's metal was of poor quality. But the plaintiff's attorney would have argued that the raised

lids significantly contributed to the failure of the bike's frame.

Watt Homes had agreed to perform roadwork near a massive housing development it was building, attorneys in the case said. But the building company allegedly never ensured that the roadway was even.

"Somebody just dropped the ball," Booth said.

A subcontractor, Colich & Sons, which worked on the water valves, will pay \$150,000, although the company contended it was not responsible for paving the nearby area. A second contractor, C.A. Rasmussen, performed work in that vicinity and allegedly should have noticed the problem. Rasmussen will pay \$35,000.

Fearing that a jury might slap a large civil judgment on Torrance, the city decided to settle, Torrance's attorneys said.

The road has been repaired.