

The Louisiana Jury Verdict Reporter

The Most Current and Complete Summary of Louisiana Jury Verdicts

April 2025

Statewide Jury Verdict Coverage

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Civil Jury Verdicts

Timely coverage of civil jury verdicts in Louisiana including court, division, presiding judge, parties, case number, attorneys and results.

Negligent Security - A night clerk at a Mansfield motel was shot and murdered – the plaintiff (representing her two adult daughters) sought wrongful death damages against the motel alleging negligent security in that the “card reader” to enter the hotel was broken and while there was surveillance cameras (they captured the entire depraved crime), no one was actually monitoring them – the jury awarded the daughters \$4,000,000 in damages assessed 50% to the motel and the remainder to the murderer

Palmer v. Best Western, 82978

Plaintiff: Scott J. Chafin, Jr. and

Marshall Johnston, *Gregorio Chafin and Johnston*, Shreveport

Defense: Richard G. Duplantier, Jr.

and Henry M. Weber, *Galloway*

Johnson Tompkins Burr & Smith, New Orleans

Verdict: \$4,000,000 for plaintiff assessed 50% to the defendant

Parish: **DeSoto**

Judge: Amy Burford McCartney

Date: 2-21-25

Lynda Palmer, age 75 and a recent widow, was working as a night clerk on the evening of 4-14-21 at the Best Western motel in Mansfield, LA. Palmer had made a career working at jewelry stores but had recently joined one of her daughters in working at the motel. The Best Western, a franchise of the Phoenix-based parent, Best Western International, was operated by Vimal Patel and his company, Govind Hospitality.

Govind Hospitality was an

independent contractor of Best Western. It operated pursuant to a Membership Agreement. Thus while Best Western would inspect the motel and make recommendations, Govind Hospitality had control of the motel's operations. It had first opened in 2011.

On the night in question it was a little after 2:00 in the morning when Terry Powell (age 19) entered the hotel. He first handed Palmer identification and indicated he wanted to rent a room. It was a ruse. Palmer quickly shifted to his real purpose. He was robbing the motel. Palmer complied and provided him money from a first register. As Palmer (compliant at all times to the criminal Powell) went to the second register, Powell shot her three times and killed her. He fled the scene. This depraved and heinous crime was captured on the motel's surveillance video.

Powell left the motel and hid the distinctively branded hoodie he was wearing. He met a friend and a sister at a nearby convenience store. Powell returned to the motel at 3:37 a.m. At this point no one had discovered that Palmer had been murdered.

However a motel guest, Matt Yeager, who supervised a Halliburton pipeline team, had come downstairs to smoke a cigarette before his team meeting at 4:00 a.m. Powell shot Yager several times in the stomach. Yager was seriously injured but was not killed. Powell then pilfered Palmer's body (looking apparently for valuables) before retrieving his

CIVIL DISTRICT COURT FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS
STATE OF LOUISIANA

DOCKET NO. 2022-10789 DIVISION "C-10"

HANNAH RUBINSTEIN
VERSUS
THE ADMINISTRATORS OF THE TULANE EDUCATIONAL FUND
DB/A TULANE UNIVERSITY

FILED: _____ DEPUTY CLERK

VERDICT FORM

1. Do you find by a preponderance of the evidence that Tulane University's negligence caused Hannah Rubinstein's injury on December 5, 2021?
Yes No _____
(If you proceed to Question No. 2, if no, proceed to the end of the form, sign your name, and notify the bailiff that you have reached a verdict.)

2. Do you find by a preponderance of the evidence that Plaintiff Hannah Rubinstein's negligence caused her own injury on December 5, 2021?
Yes No _____

3. What percentage of negligence, if any, do you assign to the following parties or entities resulting from the December 5, 2021 incident?
NOTE: Please DO NOT assign any % of fault to any party for whom you answered "No" in your responses to the above questions. The total percentages assigned must equal 100%.

Tulane University	50 %
Hannah Rubinstein	50 %
Total	100 %

4. What amount of money do you find will justly and fully compensate Plaintiff, Hannah Rubinstein, for the injuries she suffered as a result of the December 5, 2021 incident?

Past and present physical pain and suffering.....\$ 20,000
 Future physical pain and suffering.....\$ 20,000
 Past and present mental anguish.....\$ 30,000
 Future mental anguish.....\$ 20,000
 Permanent scarring and disfigurement.....\$ 30,000
 Loss of enjoyment of life.....\$ 30,000
 Future medical expenses.....\$ 100,000

(Sign and date this form and notify the bailiff that you have reached a verdict.)

Frank A. Ingargiola
 JURY REPRESENTATIVE

03/13/2025
 DATE

Frank A. Ingargiola
 PRINT NAME

The Rubenstein v. Tulane University jury verdict

employee, had an office and supervised two teaching assistants.

Moving forward later in the semester to the evening of 12-5-21, Steiner assembled a group of students from the class to assist him in preparing his graduate thesis. She was creating a work of blown glass. Rubenstein was assisting in opening and closing a "top-loading" annealing oven. The oven is extremely hot with temperatures of approximately 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

The process of operating the annealing oven requires it to be open and closed several times as the glass is created. Why? The liquid molten glass must cool slowly or it will crack. This makes working with

blown glass dangerous and because of that, the use of personal protection equipment (PPE) is essential. That includes a protective jacket and face shield. There is an entire safety protocol. A key element of the case that would develop was that Rubenstein was the least experienced person present that night (just a freshman in her first glass blowing class) working on the project.

Rubenstein was given a protective jacket and went to work. However the jacket had holes in the front. It was particularly on the front left side of her jacket. As Rubenstein opened and closed the oven, she felt the heat. She would wince in pain. However she wasn't just wearing a protective face shield, during the Covid-19 era,

she also wore a mask. No one saw her discomfort and she didn't complain.

As the project was about 75% finished, Rubenstein took off the damaged and compromised jacket. She put on one that fully protected her. The project was completed and Rubenstein went back to her dorm. It was only then that she realized she'd suffer a burn injury to her left breast. There was a large fluid sac and a discoloration. This had developed because of a cumulative contact to the heat from the annealing oven during the project. Rubenstein made an appointment with campus health for the next day.

The next day Rubenstein was identified as having four inch by two inch burn injury on her breast. She