

# VIRGINIA LAWYERS WEEKLY

Vol. 27, No. 34

valawyersweekly.com

January 21, 2013

## LARGEST VERDICTS

### VIRGINIA'S LARGEST VERDICTS OF 2012

**#11** \$3 Million

#### Webb v. Virginian-Pilot Media Companies LLC

Type of case: Defamation

Court: Chesapeake Circuit Court

Attorneys: Jeremiah A. Denton, Vivile R. Dietrich and Rhiannon M. Jordan, Virginia Beach

**Summary:** In December 2009, The Virginian-Pilot published a news article about a public school assistant principal and his son, a student in the same school system. Plaintiff alleged that the defendant newspaper falsely implied that the principal had improperly used his position to obtain preferential treatment for his son.

The article also linked the father to numerous unflattering statements about the son. These statements had previously yielded a \$5 million jury verdict against the newspaper in favor of the son.

Last May, in a separate trial, a Chesapeake Circuit Court jury awarded \$3 million to the father.

In August, Circuit Judge Randall D. Smith dismissed the verdict, finding that the plaintiff failed to show the article was published with actual malice. Plaintiff's counsel has filed an appeal.



JORDAN

**#19** \$1.2 Million

#### Walsh v. WAVY Broadcasting LLC, et al.

Type of case: Defamation

Court: U.S. District Court, Norfolk

Attorneys: Jeremiah A. Denton III, Rhiannon M. Jordan and Vivile R. Dietrich, Virginia Beach

**Summary:** Plaintiffs, a husband and wife who owned a special events rental company, brought a defamation suit against WAVY Broadcasting and its parent company. In 2010, the defendants had aired a broadcast that falsely stated or implied plaintiffs had accepted deposits for their services, knowing that they were about to close their business.

In fact, plaintiffs had merged their company with a competitor, who had agreed to honor existing deposits and contracts. Several former customers were confused about the merger and contacted the TV station. The station's reporter interviewed the couple, who gave their side of the story, but the station edited much of the interview for the aired broadcast.

A Norfolk federal jury awarded \$600,000 each to the husband and wife. The parties settled the case post-trial.