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NEWS

\$18.5M settlement in 'Transformers' accident

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Two top Hollywood film studios, makers of the high-grossing "Transformers" franchise, must ante up \$18.5 million to a Chicago woman left brain-damaged by an injury sustained while working as an extra during a 2010 filming in Northwest Indiana.

Cook County Circuit Court Judge Drella Savage Wednesday entered an order approving settlement in a lawsuit filed by 26-year-old Gabriela Cedillo's family against Paramount Pictures, DreamWorks Studios and others.

"The ultimate outcome in this case was justice for Gabriela. She lost about a third of the top of her skull, and a large part of the right side of her brain," Cedillo's lawyer, Todd Smith, said at a news conference.

At the time of the accident, Cedillo was a 24-year-old bank teller and Morton College student who dreamed of becoming an actress, and was about to close on her first home. After multiple surgeries at Loyola University Medical Center and extended rehab at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, she is partially paralyzed and partially blind, requiring 24-hour care that her siblings and parents struggle to provide.

Attorneys for Paramount and



When a cable broke in the Sept. 1, 2010, accident, it sliced through Gabriela Cedillo's car hood, windshield — and her head.



Gabriela Cedillo before and soon after the accident.

DreamWorks declined comment Wednesday on the case.

Cedillo signed up as an extra when the franchise's third film, "Transformers: Dark of the Moon," filmed here in late summer of 2010. She would be paid minimum wage and \$25 a day to drive her own car,

a 2006 Toyota Scion, in a scene being shot on a closed-off Cline Avenue in Hammond, Ind.

In the scene, according to her suit, she and some 80 extras were to drive in the westbound lanes, while stunt vehicles being towed in the eastbound lanes at about 50

mph would be sent airborne by explosives and flip, while hooked by a cable.

But the welding on a cable bracket broke, according to the suit — and the cable became a missile that smashed through Cedillo's car hood, windshield and head.

Not only had the same stunt failed the day before, but the studios had no permits for explosives they were using to flip the cars, the suit charged.

However, the Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Administration cleared the studios of fault in the Sept. 1, 2010, incident. Cedillo's family then filed suit.

Her family and lawyers blasted director Michael Bay and studio representatives for allegedly making promises to insure and pay for Cedillo's medical care.

"In reality, they did everything they could to avoid payment. Gabriela was forced onto public aid, with taxpayers picking up the bill," Smith said.

The "Transformers" franchise is among the highest-grossing in history, with "Transformers III," released in 3-D in June 2011, grossing over \$1 billion.

"There's anger, of course. But we're blessed," Cedillo's brother, Rudy Romo, said. "We're hoping for the best. She's in and out. One day, you'll get Gabby. Another day, she's a different person. When she's Gabby, she's angry. And sad."