

\$6.5 million suit settled out of court

MANSFIELD - A \$6.5 million lawsuit was settled Friday after nearly a full day of closed-door negotiations by attorneys with Judge Max Chilcote of Richland County Common Pleas Court.

Details of the accord were not released, but sources close to the case indicated a fairly substantial payment was made.

The agreement came as testimony was about to begin in the jury trial, which was expected to last about two or three weeks. The jury was sent home at mid-morning Friday when it appeared a settlement was near.

Attorneys had been talking for much of the week, and it is thought an accord was almost reached after opening statements were made on Thursday.

The suit was filed by Denver and Janice Gibson of 488 King St., Mansfield on behalf of the children of a woman who died from either carbon monoxide poisoning or gas inhalation three years ago Sunday.

Debra Lee Hesselden died in her mobile home at Fairhaven Village after her furnace was turned on. The top of a pipe carrying dangerous fumes from the furnace was covered with tape, investigators discovered. Mrs. Hesselden died less than two months after her husband died from a heart attack.

The Gibsons are the grandparents of the children, who now live with them.

Defendants in the complex case included the seller of the mobile home, Rich-Morrow Realty Co., Inc. of Mansfield; manufacturer of the mobile home, Hallmark Homes Inc. of Hagens, Pa.; furnace manufacturer Lear Siegler of Holland, Mich.; Columbia Gas of Ohio; and J. M. Wise of Mansfield who connected pipes carrying gas to the furnace.

The Gibsons' attorney, James Calhoun, said during opening statements the bottom line of the case is that "several businesses were trying to save a little bit of money with a very substantial risk to a very innocent consumer."

Lawyers for the defendants each tried to deny negligence and shift any blame for the death onto Mrs. Hesselden and other defendants.