

Houston Jury Awards \$12.1 Million Against Raymond James in Trial Over Plane Crash

Plaintiffs' attorneys claimed Weiss was using the plane for business purposes, but Raymond James refused to take any responsibility for his conduct in operation of the Beechcraft, according to court pleadings

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What You Need to Know

- A jury in probate court awarded \$12.1 million to three families who lost loved ones in a plane crash.
- The pilot was employed by Raymond James & Associates and was found negligent in his operation of the aircraft.
- The jury also found the pilot was operating the plane within the scope of his employment.

A Harris County probate court jury trial concluded with a \$12.1 million damages award to three families, finding an airplane pilot's employer financially responsible for a crash that killed six prominent Houstonians.

Jeffrey Weiss, 65, of Houston and a senior vice president of investments at Raymond James & Associates, flew a twin-engine Beechcraft Baron 58 on April 22, 2019, when it crashed near Kerrville. Records indicate Weiss had more than 5,000 flight hours.

Aboard the plane was Marc Tellepsen, 45; Mark Scioneaux, 58; Reagan Miller, 55 and two other passengers who were not parties in this trial. The plaintiffs claimed Weiss was working for Raymond James at the time of the crash, and was operating the aircraft in a negligent manner while in the scope his employment.

The three lawsuits at issue, consolidated for trial, were prepared by Houston attorney Richard Mithoff and Dallas attorney Ladd Sanger of the Slack Davis Sanger firm. Sanger specializes in aviation crashes and



Richard Mithoff (left) and Todd Sanger (right) attorneys for plaintiffs

catastrophic personal injuries.

An investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board indicated a lack of fuel as the cause of the crash, according to court records. The plane left West Houston Airport early on the morning of the crash for Kerrville to look at a property near Hunt, Texas. Other passengers were employed to help develop the property.

Also aboard were Houstonians Stuart R. Kensinger, 65, a real estate investor and Angela Webb Kensinger, 54, a St. John's High School lacrosse coach.

"Jeffrey Weiss was employed by Raymond James as a financial advisor and he would fly his own plane to engage with clients and prospective clients," Mithoff said. "Raymond James regularly reimbursed him for the use of his plane if they determined his flight was for a business purpose."

Plaintiffs' attorneys claimed Weiss was using the plane for business purposes, but Raymond James refused to take any responsibility for his conduct in operation of the Beechcraft, Mithoff said.

On Question 1 of Monday's verdict, jurors answered that Weiss' negligence was the proximate cause of the accident. They then answered that he was acting within the scope of his employment. Judge Michael Newman of Probate Court No. 2 presided.

Mithoff represented the families of Tellepsen and Scioneaux, landscape architects. The named plaintiffs include Stanton Welch, spouse of Scioneaux and artistic director of Houston Ballet, and Jennifer Tellepsen, widow and mother of two minor children and Mark Tellepsen's parents, Tom and Kathleen Tellepsen. Welch and the Tellepsens were also represented by probate attorneys Laurel M. Smith and W. Cameron McCulloch of MacIntyre McCulloch & Stanfield.

Sanger represented Ann Christensen, widow of Reagan Miller and the Miller children.

"These are extraordinary families and we were honored to represent them," Mithoff said. "They are gratified by the verdict."

Damages were awarded for pecuniary losses and losses of companionship. Welch was awarded \$2.8 million for the death of his husband, Scioneaux. The Tellepsens were awarded \$5.8 million. Christensen and the Miller sons were awarded \$3.5 million.

The Cunningham Swaim law firm in Dallas represented Raymond James. Lead counsel M. Ross Cunningham had not responded to a request for comment by the time of publishing.

Attorney Shannon R. Ramirez of Gieger, Laborde & Laperouse in Houston represented the Weiss estate.