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Ind. State Fair Tragedy: Lawsuits Filed, Death Toll Reaches 6

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A 22-year-old college student injured when a stage collapsed at the Indiana State Fair died Friday, the same day lawsuits were filed on behalf of two other victims.

Jennifer Haskell, a Ball State University senior, became the sixth person to die from injuries suffered in the collapse that happened while fans were waiting for the country act [Sugarland](#) to perform. Four died immediately, including Haskell's best friend and Tammy Vandam, a 42-year-old Wanatah homemaker and former disc jockey. One of the lawsuits filed Friday was on behalf of Vandam's estate and her 17-year-old daughter.

A fifth person died hours after the collapse from his injuries.

Haskell's uncle, Mike Whited, announced her death in a statement Friday after it was first reported by *The Star Press* of Muncie.

Haskell was entering her senior year at Ball State University in Muncie, where she was studying sports medicine. Her uncle said she had planned on becoming an athletic trainer after playing softball and basketball at Monroe Central High School in Parker City, about 70 miles northeast of Indianapolis.

"After a long courageous battle, Jenny Haskell died at 8:15 this morning from her injuries sustained from the tragedy at the State Fair," her family's statement said. "Jenny's family would like to thank everyone for their support and prayers during this difficult time. Continued support and prayers from the remaining victims would be greatly appreciated."

Haskell died at an Indianapolis hospital. It was not clear Friday how many of the roughly four dozen injured in the stage collapse remained hospitalized. State police stopped providing updates on the injured earlier this week. Condition reports have not been available from hospitals.

State Fair spokesman Andy Klotz told WTHR-TV the fair expresses "its deepest sympathies to her family."

The others killed were Haskell's best friend, 23-year-old Alina Bigjohny of Fort Wayne, who was recently hired to teach seventh-grade English in Muncie; stagehand Nathan Byrd, 51, of Indianapolis, who was atop the rigging when it fell and later died from his injuries; Glenn Goodrich, 49, of Indianapolis, who worked for an underwater camera and lighting equipment company; and Christina Santiago, 29, of Chicago, a gay activist and program manager for a Chicago nonprofit.

The Valparaiso law firm of Kenneth J. Allen & Associates filed lawsuits on behalf of Vandam's survivors and 49-year-old Beth Urschel, who was injured in the collapse. Vandam and Urschel were life partners, and attorney Kenneth Allen said he planned to use the lawsuits to challenge Indiana state law regarding the rights of same-sex partners.

More lawsuits are expected. Indiana law caps the state's responsibility at \$5 million per accident, but with so many victims, several lawyers have said they expect a wide range of entities to be sued to greater a bigger pool of money. Vandam's lawsuit names the fair, the state and companies that put on the show. Urschel's names the companies.

Allen said there was a "strategy" behind leaving the state out of Urschel's suit and the list of defendants would likely expand.

The defendants didn't immediately return phone messages seeking comment Friday.

A fund the Central Indiana Community Foundation set up for the victims raised nearly \$107,000 by Friday, foundation spokesman Mike Knight said. That tally didn't include donations expected from a [Train-Maroon 5](#) concert Thursday night in Indianapolis.

--Associated Press

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