

Millions awarded for brain-damaged boy

A settlement of a lawsuit against Northern States Power Company on behalf of a 16-year-old Coon Rapids boy was recently approved by the Anoka County District Court.

Ronald Holmstrom was hurt by an NSP power line when he climbed a tree in the backyard of a Fridley home July 5, 1982. He had climbed the tree earlier in the evening to rescue a kitten and for some unknown reason went back up the tree at the time he was electrocuted.

The power line that injured Holmstrom was a bare, uninsulated 8,000 volt power line which ran through the heart of the large, old oak tree that he was climbing at the time he was hurt, according to the boy's attorney Fred M. Soucie, Anoka.

The settlement provides for a lump sum of cash, \$1.9 million, to be paid immediately. In addition to the lump sum, annual payments are to be made each year commencing Oct. 3, 1985. The beginning annual payment is \$190,800 and this amount will grow at a six percent compounded annual interest rate. This means that the amount paid will double in size about every 11 years.

Holmstrom needs constant care, 24-hours a day, according to Soucie. He also needs physical therapy

and stimulation therapy many times each week. To care for Holmstrom with an in-home program he needs a specially constructed home suited to in-home care.

"This settlement will allow us to take excellent care of Ronnie. We will be able to maximize Ronnie's comfort, hygiene and dignity, while also maximizing his potential to be further rehabilitated" Soucie said.

The Holmstrom family has been caring for Ronald at home since March 7, 1982, when he was discharged from Unity Hospital, Fridley. The family has been caring for Holmstrom with the assistance of a number of volunteers as well as parttime staffing of health aides.

Commenting on the Holmstrom family's care for their child, Soucie said, "I have been inspired by the heroism of this family who have cared for Ronnie in their own living room for the past 19 months.

"Ronnie was so terribly braininjured that he has not been able to effectively communicate with us at all and he has needed constant care every minute, of every hour, of every day. The Holmstrom family has sacrificed everything to give that care to Ronnie.

"I have never seen a family give as much as the Holmstrom's have given to Ronnie and I have never

seen anyone as determined as the Holmstrom family in their effort to provide care for him. They have done everything to make Ronnie as comfortable as possible and to enhance his recovery and rehabilitation as well".

Holmstrom's heart was stopped by the flow of electricity into his body when a tree branch he was holding came into contact with the bare 8,000 volt power line, according to Soucie. He was brought back to life five to seven minutes later, but only after suffering extensive brain damage.

"I am very pleased with the settlement. The Holmstrom family will continue to care for Ronnie at home, but will be able to provide a comfortable environment and a lot of special equipment which is going to make life a lot easier for Ronnie and the Holmstroms. The Holmstroms will also be hiring nursing personnel to take care of Ronnie in the Holmstrom home, which should allow the Holmstrom family to resume a more normal life of their own," Soucie said.

Soucie expressed concern that the public is not aware of the danger involved in these bare, high-voltage power lines which run through residential

neighborhoods.

"This is one of the most dangerous things known to modern man and no one that I talked with about this power line, during my representation of Ronald Holmstrom, was aware of this dangerous thing which we have in our own backyards," Soucie said.

NSP's own standards call for five feet of clearance at a minimum to be established around this power line. At the time Holmstrom was hurt there was only 14¼ inches of clearance between the power line and the tree he was climbing, according to Soucie.

"There is just no way that this condition of a 14-year-old boy, a big old climbable tree and this bare 8,000 volt power line should have been allowed to come together like they did, producing this terrible tragedy," Soucie said.

The power line was installed 23 years before Holmstrom was hurt and was never properly trimmed, according to Soucie, a partner in the Anoka law firm of Jensen, Hicken, Gedde and Soucie.

The award is believed to be the largest personal injury settlement in Minnesota.

If Holmstrom lives out his life expectancy, the amount could reach an estimated \$79 million.