



Demanding Accountability

The record-setting results of Lyons & Simmons drive change in corporate practices, public awareness

ROBERT RYMERS was preparing a late-night meal in his San Antonio kitchen when his life changed forever. Without warning, a previously undetected natural gas build-up ignited, ripping apart the small home and leaving Robert with life-altering burns over more than 40 percent of his body. In the next room, the force of the blast caused Virginia Rymers, Robert's mother, to suffer an air embolism, in addition to significant burns.

Despite independent investigations by the San Antonio Fire and Police Departments showing a natural gas leak as the most likely cause of the 2021 explosion, the region's gas supplier, CPS Energy, offered multiple, inconsistent explanations for the disaster. Those explanations would be roundly rejected at the trial's conclusion.

In February 2025, a jury returned a \$109.5 million verdict against CPS for failing to properly maintain its gas system. The verdict is believed to be the largest negligence verdict in the history of Bexar County.

"I got into the practice of law for cases exactly like this one," said Michael Lyons, who was lead counsel for the Rymers. "This case truly was a David and Goliath scenario. My clients were intellectually disabled and were being steamrolled by a system that did not care about them. I am really proud of the result for our clients and our entire trial team."

Lyons says the facts of the case and size of the verdict – and resulting attention from news media – should force CPS to take a more serious approach to maintaining and repairing an aging gas infrastructure. Questions raised during the trial about gas system maintenance and safety should invite scrutiny from political leaders and the public.

"This outcome sends a message to the citizens of this region and across the state that you can hold big businesses accountable, and you can make changes in corporate behavior an expectation," said Chris Simmons. "That's the power a jury has with its verdict."

Additional recent results obtained by Lyons &

Simmons serve as further examples of that mission. In the wake of the tragic mass casualties and injuries at the Travis Scott concert at Houston's Astroworld Festival in 2021, Michael Lyons and Chris Simmons served on the plaintiffs' executive committee, taking a tip of the spear role in the case development which contributed to favorable settlements that were reached for all the death victims. By holding multiple defendants responsible for their collective actions, inactions and decisions, the safety and security protocols for concerts and other large outdoor events across the nation have been examined, and positive changes have been implemented.

"The Astroworld case presented the challenge of a mass casualty event where ten young people lost their lives, and the entire ordeal was witnessed by tens of thousands of people. The sheer volume of witnesses, people impacted and people involved seemed overwhelming at times," said Lyons. "But it was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career as a trial lawyer to play a meaningful part in one of the best choreographed and organized teams of gifted trial attorneys I've ever had the pleasure of working with."

In 2021, Lyons was lead counsel in a multi-fatality motor vehicle crash that resulted in the largest wrongful death verdict in the history of Midland County. Following that verdict, Lyons led a Lyons & Simmons trial team that secured the second largest medical malpractice verdict in the State of Texas for 2022. Lyons was also a part of a trial team that secured a victory for the family of Kierstin Smith who was tragically killed by a Tower Crane that collapsed in June of 2021 onto her apartment building. In April of 2023, a Dallas County jury rendered its verdict of more than \$860 million.

The facts of the case showed that despite multiple weather warnings of significant storms, the crane operator failed to properly "weathervane" the crane at the end of his shift the night before the accident. The industry's best practice allows a crane to safely

rotate during periods of high winds, such as those reported shortly before the collapse.

The intense public attention following the event, together with the trial outcomes, brought greater scrutiny on construction safety protocols by developers and contractors across the real estate industry.

The safety of even the youngest guest should be the focus of any hospitality company. But unfortunately, that's not always the case. After a toddler was left with permanent brain damage and seizures when her chair unexpectedly collapsed at a North Texas resort in 2021, Chris Simmons led a Lyons & Simmons team that uncovered that the seemingly random accident was one in a long string of similar chair failures at the same property.

"We discovered what was an open secret among employees of scores of chairs that had also collapsed under guests without warning," said Simmons. "Rather than replace a dangerous product, employees were directed to repair those chairs or swap them out for a less damaged version. It was a shocking display of irresponsibility from a major hotel chain."

Last year Simmons reached a confidential settlement that will take care of the child for a lifetime.

"All too often we discover that the corporate practices that result in a catastrophic injury or death are not just being allowed to happen, but in certain situations also encouraged," said Simmons. "When you see that, you feel compelled not only to make things right for the client, but also to put an end to those practices before additional tragedies occur."

"People in this country seem to be frustrated with a lot of things. The real power of the courthouse is that average citizens have a say in what is acceptable conduct in their community," said Lyons. "It is one of the greatest honors of my life to be able to tell my clients stories to juries and appeal to ordinary people to do justice. And most of the time they seem to get it right." **B**