

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **\$30 Million Wrongful Death Suit Filed Against Pittsfield Township Police Officers**

*Failed to conduct sobriety test & placed “super drunk” driver back on road, resulting in crash that killed Ann Arbor wife & mother*

**WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI** (October 30, 2018) — The estate of a 55-year-old Ann Arbor woman has filed a \$30 million wrongful death lawsuit against the two Pittsfield Township police officers who let a “super drunk” driver leave the scene of an accident in his damaged and uninsured car, only to crash head-on with her vehicle less than one-quarter mile after being placed back on the road.



Lake Jacobson, a wife and mother of two, was catastrophically injured on December 30, 2017, when a 2000 Chrysler Concorde driven by Desten Houge, 32, crossed the center line on Michigan Avenue and slammed into her Ford 500. Houge was pronounced dead at the scene. Jacobson was alive and screaming when first responders arrived. She was extricated from her vehicle with the jaws of life. Among other traumatic injuries, Lake sustained a broken neck. She died four days later at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital.

Police dash-cam video shows Houge talking to the two Pittsfield Township officers just before his deadly collision with Jacobson. The officers arrived on the scene of Houge’s first accident, in which he lost control of his vehicle and went off the road into a snow-filled ditch. Houge told the officers he recently purchased the vehicle for \$600 and it was uninsured. Investigation showed



the car’s suspension was in a dangerous condition. The dash-cam video shows Houge stumbling and falling while talking to the officers. One officer helped Houge up from the ground as the tow truck arrived to pull Houge’s vehicle from the ditch. Despite Houge’s suspicious behavior, the officers did not conduct any field sobriety testing and put Houge back on the road. A short distance down the same roadway, Houge crossed the center line and struck Jacobson’s vehicle head-on.



Several other drivers witnessed the crash. One witness said that Houge’s vehicle was rocking excessively as he increased his speed and that it fishtailed. Another witness told police she saw Houge leaving the scene of his first accident and was surprised how fast he was driving. Other witnesses said they saw parts “flying off” Houge’s car as he sped down the road.

Tests performed on Houge after the crash showed that he had a blood-alcohol content (BAC) of .24 percent – three times Michigan's legal limit. A person with a BAC of .17 or higher is considered “super drunk” under state law. Tests also showed that Houge had THC, a chemical associated with marijuana, in his system.

“We want accountability,” said Lake’s husband, Mark Jacobson. “We are not vindictive people, but things should have been handled differently. It was an entirely preventable accident.” Lake was known for helping others. She founded the Great Lakes Rabbit Sanctuary, participated in the Washtenaw Elves and volunteered at the Saline Fiddlers Philharmonic and Fiddlers Restrung. “She spent much of her life trying to make things better for others. And that’s what we want to do. We want to make things better in the future.”

The crash that took the lives of Jacobson and Houge should never have happened, said Angel Harris, Manager of Victim Services at [Mothers Against Drunk Driving \(MADD\) Michigan](#). “The tools and procedures in place to prepare officers to detect impaired drivers were not utilized at the scene of the first crash. This tragedy was not an accident. It was the result of impaired driving and negligence. To prevent anything similar from happening again, there must be changes made to ensure that drunk drivers who have encounters with law enforcement are detected and removed from our roadways. MADD Michigan stands behind the family of Lake Jacobson and the entire Michigan community in demanding that our roadways be safer.”

The \$30 million wrongful death lawsuit, *The Estate of Lake Jacobson, Deceased v Hornbeck, et al.* (Case No. 2018-1109-NI), was filed October 25, 2018 in Washtenaw County Circuit Court. The complaint alleges the defendants, Pittsfield Township Police Officers Matthew Hornbeck and Samuel Bradley, were grossly negligent in permitting Houge to operate an unsafe vehicle on the roadway and are liable for damages under Michigan’s [Wrongful Death Act](#). The suit also names Sakstrup Towing, Inc. as a defendant for negligently allowing an unsafe vehicle to return to the roadway.

Ann Arbor attorneys Steve Goethel and Chad Engelhardt, of Goethel Engelhardt PLLC, represent the Jacobson family in the civil lawsuit.

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