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Title: Jury says woman not guilty for girl's death
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By KRISTINA Smith Staff writer

PORT CLINTON -- A city woman wept and hugged her attorney as a jury acquitted her Wednesday of negligently causing a car crash last summer that killed her 8-year-old niece.

After 45 minutes of deliberating, the 12 members found Christy Thornsberry, 30, 222 E. Second St., not guilty of one felony count of aggravated vehicular homicide.

Thornsberry was driving with a suspended license when she crashed a Jeep Cherokee on Aug. 1 on Ohio 53 north of Wine Cellar Road on Catawba Island. Her niece, Tabitha Picklesimer of Willard, was in the front seat and died at the scene of a broken neck, Ottawa County coroner Dr. Jerome McTague testified Wednesday.

"I am very happy for my client," said Thornsberry's attorney, Thomas DeBacco of Port Clinton. "She lived with extreme grief for over a year now. I hope the verdict can help her deal with her grief."

Thornsberry, whose phone number had been disconnected, could not be reached for comment.

Ottawa County assistant prosecutor Lorrain Croy was not available.

No one answered the phone Wednesday evening at the home of Henrietta Reed of Williard, Tabitha's grandmother and her primary caregiver. Tabitha's mother could not be reached.

Ohio State Highway Patrol troopers were unable to determine what caused Thornsberry's Jeep to leave Ohio 53, strike a drainage culvert and become airborne. The sport utility vehicle struck two small trees before crashing into a utility-support wire, Trooper Brian Mamere testified Tuesday.

Tabitha was partially ejected from the car, McTague testified.

Thornsberry had not been using alcohol or drugs and had not been speeding, Mamere said. He testified the scene was similar to crashes where the driver had fainted.

Thornsberry told Mamere after the crash she might have swerved to avoid a dog but said she could not remember much about the accident, Mamere testified.

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