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Port Clinton woman cleared in crash that killed niece

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PORT CLINTON

A Port Clinton woman walked free a year after a car crash that killed her 8-year-old niece.

A 12-person jury found Christy Thornsberry, 30, 222 E. Second St., not guilty of one felony count of aggravated vehicular homicide Wednesday in Ottawa County Common Pleas Court.

"I am just absolutely thrilled for my client," said Thomas DeBacco, Thornsberry's attorney. "She can now hopefully have some relief from the extreme grief from the day of this accident."

Thornsberry was driving her red 1997 Jeep Cherokee Sport on Aug. 1, 2006, when it crashed into a culvert on Ohio 53 near Mon Ami Restaurant. Her niece, Tabitha Picklesimer, Willard, was partially thrown from the vehicle and died at the scene.

Thornsberry, whose license was suspended at the time, said she swerved to miss a large dog. During testimony on Tuesday, Ohio State Highway Patrol Trooper Shaun Robinson said there was no evidence of a loose dog in the area.

"Based on my previous experience, you usually see some sort of road mark," said Trooper Brian Mamere, who responded to the accident. "You would see immediate braking."

During closing arguments Wednesday, DeBacco said the prosecution had no evidence supporting its claim that Thornsberry was negligent.

"They gave no reason why her vehicle left the roadway," DeBacco said. "They couldn't blame it on drugs, alcohol or reckless driving."

Ottawa County Assistant Prosecutor Lorrain Croy was not available for comment, but said during closing arguments that Thornsberry was negligent.

"This death was avoidable. This crash was avoidable," Croy said. "Her negligence caused this crash."

After the accident, troopers attempted to get a blood sample to see if she was under the influence of any drugs or alcohol. According to police reports, Thornsberry refused to give a blood sample.

Thornsberry could not be reached for comment Wednesday.