



Consolidated Property Damage and Subrogation Suits Net \$1.55 Million

In *Colaiani and Franklin Mutual v. South Jersey Gas*, a utility company paid \$1.55 million on May 3 to settle claims in Camden County stemming from a gas leak that destroyed a house.

The home of John and Nancy Colaiani in Laurel Springs exploded and burst into flames in the early morning hours of December 21, 2012. The couple and their two daughters



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLES NUGENT

CHARLES NUGENT JR.

escaped without injury after making their way down the stairs and through the house as it collapsed around them, said their attorney, **Charles Nugent Jr.**, a Marlton solo.

South Jersey Gas provided gas service to the home. Investigators determined that the fire was caused by a tree root that cracked the gas line and caused gas to migrate into the family's basement, Nugent said.

The plaintiffs' insurance came up short by \$143,000 in its reimbursement of the family for construction of a new home and for replacement of their lost belongings, according to Nugent. In addition, the entire family alleged anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder

Their suit was consolidated with one by their insurance company, Franklin Mutual, seeking subrogation for its payout from the incident.

The two suits were mediated with former Superior Court Judge **Daniel Mecca**, who is with the **Mecca Law Firm** in Paramus.

A plaintiff's expert opined that the defendant deviated from federal standards for maintenance of gas lines, Nugent said.

The settlement, calling for payment of \$700,000 to Franklin Mutual and \$850,000 to the Colaianis, was reached in early April.

The lawyer for South Jersey Gas was **Geri Jaffee** of **Marks, O'Neill, O'Brien, Doherty and Kelly**, who did not return a call. Franklin Mutual's lawyer was **Stephen Katzman** of **Methfessel & Werbel** in Edison.

— *By Charles Toutant*