

DAILY REPORT

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Jury duty nets \$25 a day—and a wedding

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THE PLAINTIFF IN a 2009 Clayton County auto design-defect case won a \$17.7 million award, but two of the jurors may have come out even better: They got each other.

As they served together on the jury in *Wheeler v. Ford Motor Co.*, Maria Mullen, 41, and Dwayne Hull, 47, didn't speak much to each other.

"During the trial, I was in a relationship—kind of a fading relationship—so I really wasn't paying attention to anybody else," said Mullen. "We were just focusing on the case."

On July 9, the couple will be focused on each other as they wed in Jonesboro.

The case involved allegations that a failed seat latch on a Ford Explorer led to the injuries that paralyzed Lynn Wheeler, then 58, during a Christmas 2005 wreck. After a three-week trial, the jury awarded \$17.7 million in actual damages and had retired to deliberate on punitive damages when Ford reached a confidential settlement with the plaintiff.

Afterward, as the panel was saying its good-byes on Dec. 18, 2009, Hull decided to exchange business cards with the pretty woman he'd noticed as they served together during the three-week trial.



JOANNA HENDERSON/ATLANTA LIFESTYLE & WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

Dwayne Hull and Maria Mullen met while serving on the jury in a Clayton County auto design-defect case.

About a month later, said Mullen, Hull called, and—after exchanging a few phone conversations—asked for a date.

"It was still after Father's Day 2010 before we went out," said Mullen.

Their first date?

"Believe it or not, it was a place called 'This Is It,'" said Mullen with a laugh. "And we realized then that, yep, this was it."

Hull said the couple will honeymoon in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

"I let her pick everything," he said, "the wedding date, the honeymoon. Whatever she wants, that's what we'll do."

According to a press release from Butler, Wooten & Fryhofer, which represented Wheeler at trial, when Mullen and Hull dropped in on Clayton County State Court Judge Morris E. Braswell in April to share the news of their engagement, he interrupted his proceedings to announce to the court that "something good comes out of jury duty."

"This is a first for us," said James E. Butler Jr., Wheeler's lead attorney, as quoted in the release. "Justice and love both served by jury duty!" 