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the longest day of the year, that the sky was clear, the road was straight and argue that any reasonable driver going the speed limit would have had plenty of time to stop or avoid someone.

"We began coming up with lots of inconsistencies, and, dare I say, false statements," said Antonio Romanucci, a Chicago lawyer representing Tropea-Zieser in a wrongful death lawsuit against Heckel, 42, and her insurer. "The measurements don't lie."

They have other questions, too, like why no one took a full statement from Heckel's husband, Kenosha Police Sgt. Eugene Heckel Jr., 45, or tried to find and question the unnamed friends the Heckels said they were with in the hours before the crash.

### The day

On June 17, Combs and her mother spent the day preparing for Combs' trip to Kentucky to visit her father in two days. They shopped and had dinner out before Combs went to visit her friend Samantha Rodriguez about 6:30 p.m.

"Thank God we had a good day," Tropea-Zieser said this week.

Rodriguez told investigators the pair had been walking east on County Highway N and then had turned back to the west. Both girls were barefoot, Combs showing off her green nails with smiley faces on each one. Rodriguez was on the narrow gravel shoulder, she said, while Combs was about a foot into the roadway. As they neared Rodriguez's driveway, she heard a car coming, yelled at Combs and tried to pull her to the side, but Combs was hit and flew into the air. It was just after 9 p.m.

Rodriguez ran to her house. Her stepfather came out and tried CPR, but Combs probably was dead on impact from multiple massive injuries, according to deputies' and a medical examiner's reports.

The Heckels' blue 2008 Honda Accord stopped about 435 feet from the point of impact, well west of the Rodriguez driveway, according to investigators.

Kenosha County sheriff's deputies responded to the scene. Their reports describe Denise Heckel as very upset and crying uncontrollably, but showing "absolutely" no signs of intoxication. In her statement, she wrote that she had left work at 3:30 p.m. that day and texted her husband who was doing concrete work in the 6400 block of 64th St. He asked her to bring him some beer, so she stopped at Woodman's and picked up a six-pack of wine coolers for herself as well.

She said she drank five of the coolers at the house in Kenosha before she and her husband left there around 6:30 p.m. and drove to their property in the 3200 block of 136th Ave. in Paris, where they hung out with friends. She states she had no more alcohol and drank only water until she and her husband left their property about 9 p.m.

Heckel said she was westbound on Highway N, going about the 55 mph speed limit, when she noticed the two teens "blocking" the roadway. "I then swerved over into the eastbound lane of CTH N to avoid hitting them. I believe I was completely in the eastbound lane of CTH N. It seemed that one of the girls jumped toward my vehicle."

She wrote that she knew she had hit someone and stopped the car. She told her husband, who then got out and called 911.

### No written statement

Though he was never asked to write out a full statement like his wife, Eugene Heckel did talk with at least three deputies at the scene, according to their reports. According to the reports, Eugene Heckel said his wife drove because he had been drinking, and that he had been "resting" in the passenger seat and awoke when the car hit Combs.

Two deputies' reports describe the driver's seat as "very far forward," which "shows someone very short was driving" and "higher than and much closer to the dashboard" than the passenger seat.

Romanucci thinks that overstates the seats' positions, citing photos that deputies took at the scene. He and co-counsel Timothy Knurr of Racine think it's possible that the Heckels switched seats after the crash, and that an outside agency should have conducted the investigation and may have done more work on that issue.

They are particularly concerned because Combs' friend said a man was driving the car. But she may have been referring to Mehmet Uygur, who says he drove up on the scene within a minute or two of the crash and saw Denise Heckel behind the wheel. He had gotten out of his car and gone toward Combs' body.

"There was no big funny business," Uygur said in an interview. "You could see it in that lady's face. She was white as a ghost, like she knew she had just killed someone."

Rodriguez told investigators the driver was a male about 6 feet tall with dark hair and facial hair. Eugene Heckel is about that tall, but has light hair, Uygur said in an interview. Uygur said he has dark hair and a beard and is about 5 foot 6, and he thinks Rodriguez was referring to him.

More than two hours after the crash, Denise Heckel voluntarily had her blood drawn. Test results showed a blood-alcohol level of .057.

Romanucci contends that had her blood been tested closer to the time of the crash it would have been between .09 and .10, over the .08 level at which the law presumes impairment. He asks why deputies at the scene wouldn't have taken a preliminary breath test in an abundance of caution, given the fatality and Denise Heckel's admission that she had been drinking earlier in the day.

Kenosha County Sgt. Gil Benn, the department spokesman, said that without some signs of impairment, like odor on the driver's breath, slurred speech or empty containers, deputies have no reasonable suspicion to take an immediate breath test with a portable device, especially when the driver agrees to a more accurate blood draw, as Heckel did.

Cincinnati, the newspaper said, it would not have been tested if Heckel's BAC was .08, she would have had

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Ginkowski, the prosecutor, said it wouldn't have mattered if Heckel's BAC was .20; she would have had a defense because the crash would have happened regardless of impairment.

Should the department have asked for an outside agency to do the investigation?

"I don't think the connections or relations were close enough to imply an impropriety," Benn said, noting that Denise Heckel hadn't been a dispatcher since 1993, when she worked for Kenosha Joint Services (she currently works for Kenosha County's highway division), and that her husband works for a different law enforcement agency.

He said investigators probably didn't feel the need to talk with the friends the Heckels had been with because Denise Heckel had submitted to a blood draw, and that he didn't know why they didn't take a full statement from Eugene Heckel.

"When there's law enforcement involved, I know people always want to see conspiracies," Benn said. "We wish the family the best. No getting around it. That's a tough curveball life threw at them."

Tropea-Zieser said the fog of her tragic summer is just starting to lift. She recalled Combs as "the best daughter," someone who helped around the house and with her 8-year-old brother Matthew. She liked journalism and photography and was just starting to care about her hair and makeup and boys, her mother said.

Combs' eyes were donated, her mother said, and she hopes to pass out pins depicting green ribbons, the symbol for organ donation, to all of Combs' friends - many who will be getting their driver's licenses this year - to remember their friend, and to be careful drivers.

"To me, they're more like Micki pins," she said.



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