

Daily Herald

August 17, 2006

AMBULANCE BREAKDOWN PROVOKES LAWSUIT

Tona Kunz, Daily Herald Staff Writer

An Aurora family is suing the city and its fire department claiming slow ambulance service led to the death of the family's patriarch.

Sheri Myers filed the lawsuit this month on behalf of herself and her three brothers over the death of their father, Vernon Panega.

"It really is everyone's worst nightmare," said Kenneth J. Allen, the Chicago attorney hired by the family. "Ambulances should run. We think a message needs to be sent that this is not the way to run a fire department or emergency service."

According to the lawsuit, Panega experienced breathing difficulty March 9 and an ambulance was called to take him to the hospital. The ambulance arrived, but was unable to leave with Panega because of an undisclosed problem, likely mechanical or fuel related, Allen said. Panega waited about 45 minutes before he was taken in an ambulance, and during that time he suffered a heart attack and brain injury due to reduced oxygen, Allen said.

The 82-year-old who had been in good health prior to the ambulance call never recovered and died July 1, Allen added.

The lawsuit seeks an undetermined amount of money for negligence and wrongful death, claiming the fire department failed to maintain its vehicles and lacked a plan for when vehicles do not operate. The suit says the ambulance was parked in such a way that it blocked other vehicles, prohibiting someone from moving Panega to another vehicle to get him to the hospital.

Aurora fire officials and the city attorney could not be reached for comment.

Sheri Myers, who serves as executor of her father's estate, declined comment.

© 2006 Daily Herald Record Number: 870784