

Cemetery is named in lawsuit

Families can't find loved ones

By **TERRI SANGINITI**
Staff reporter

A second lawsuit has been filed accusing owners of a Wilmington cemetery and a local funeral director of negligence in connection with the burial of a body in an unknown location.

Attorney Lois Dawson filed the 18-page lawsuit against House of Wright Mortuary and Riverview Cemetery in New Castle County Superior Court late Wednesday on behalf of Crystal Green and her grandmother Elena Green.

Crystal Green's mother, Susie C. Green, who is Elena's daughter, was buried at the cemetery at 33rd and N. Market streets on Dec. 16, 1998.

Last month, when grave G-76 was opened to exhumate Green's remains, a white casket was found where Green's rose-colored casket was supposed to be located.

"We now have two people who are missing," said Dawson.

The attorney also represents Wilmington widow Jackie Allen, whose 57-

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Attorney Lois Dawson

year-old husband, Melvin, was buried in the same section of the cemetery a month before Green.

When officials tried to disinter Allen's body in March 2001, they found a rusted white casket floating in water, grave G-75, where his bronze-coated casket was believed to be.

Cemetery officials said their records indicated that that was the grave where Allen was buried.

They said they did not know who was buried in the white casket in his place.

As in Allen's lawsuit, the named defendants in the Greens' suit are funeral director Robert O. Wright; former cemetery executive director Walt Mateja; the fraternal lodges, Eden Lodge 34 and Delaware

Lawsuit: Two bodies misplaced

FROM PAGE B1

Lodge 1 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows; Billy Cromer, the Noble Grand of Odd Fellows Lodge 1; Odd Fellows Grand Lodge of Delaware; and the Grand Lodge of the Knights of Pythias of Pennsylvania.

Mateja, one of the defendants in the case, would not comment Friday.

Dawson said she is still involved in litigation against the cemetery's former insurer to compensate Allen for her loss.

The 130-year-old nonprofit cemetery, which has been abandoned since filing for bankruptcy last year amid allegations of mismanagement by the state Attorney General's Office, is owned by the two Odd Fellows fraternal lodges and the Grand Lodge of the Knights of Pythias.

Parties in the attorney general's consumer fraud suit are still finalizing a settlement to

turn the cemetery over to a local minister.

Robert Wright, who made funeral arrangements and purchased burial plots for both Allen and Green, "has never been able to produce any written document stating the whereabouts of [Green] despite their contract which states that they were responsible for the purchase of the burial plot at Riverview Cemetery," the lawsuit states.

Wright would not comment Friday.

After her daughter was buried, Elena Green said she paid \$15 every three months for a plastic foam marker with artificial flowers atop the grave with the words: Daughter.

The family also made periodic payments at the cemetery office for a permanent grave marker.

They were unable to finish

paying for the marker because the office closed after the cemetery went bankrupt in June 2001, Dawson said.

"When they did the digging the first time [for Allen] and learned they had misplaced [my daughter's] body, we weren't able to find the temporary marker after that," Elena Green

said Friday.

Green said she is very distraught about not being able to visit her daughter's grave.

"Sometimes, that's all I think about," she said. "It really has been very, very upsetting to our family."

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