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Posted: Friday, 07 November 2008 9:04PM

Lake County Pays Family \$1 Million in Negligence Case

Lake County News-Sun Reporting

MUNDELEIN -- One of Lake County's largest nursing home negligence lawsuits ended this week with a \$1 million payment to the family of a Mundelein victim.

Lake County agreed to pay the seven-figure settlement to the family of Helen Menneke, an Alzheimer's patient who died at 83 while a resident at Winchester House in Libertyville.

A lawsuit filed on behalf of Menneke's husband and three daughters claimed the county-operated nursing home failed to take proper measures to prevent Menneke's continuous falls.

According to court documents, Menneke was admitted to Winchester House in January 2004 as her dementia increased. Before she was admitted, her gait had become unsteady and she had trouble walking, said Steven Levin, an attorney with the law firm of Levin & Perconti, which represented the Menneke family.

Levin argued that despite her unsteadiness, Menneke never had a fall assessment completed by Winchester staff. He also said that the nursing home took no significant action to prevent further falls after six recorded tumbles in her first eight months there.

"There were six opportunities to take appropriate measures to assure (future) injuries would not occur," Levin said.

By September 2004, nurses at Winchester implemented wheelchair and bed alarms to notify them when Menneke was up, but the technology was not used properly and Menneke fell two more times, Levin said. Those last two falls caused her to suffer brain injuries and hip and elbow fractures. She died in early January 2005.

Litigation continued for more than three years before a \$1 million settlement was reached in August. The payments were finalized Wednesday, said Jay Terselic, an attorney for the county.

Levin said the agreement is the largest nursing home negligence settlement in Lake County history.

Since Menneke's falls, Winchester has implemented a stricter monitoring of bed and wheelchair alarms for patients with histories of falling.

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