

Lawsuit seeks \$37.2M from doctor, St. Anthony Hospital

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A Pilot Rock man and his wife have filed a lawsuit claiming St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton, and an emergency department doctor there provided substandard care that resulted in the paralysis of his legs and lower body.

Gregory Denton and his spouse Melinda Wachter seek \$37.2 million in all. Pickett Dummigan McCall, a personal injury law firm in Portland, filed the lawsuit on Dec. 30 in Umatilla County Circuit Court. The lawsuit names the hospital and Dr. Sheldon Olen Wendler as the defendants.

According to the complaint, Denton on the night of July 6, 2019, went to the Pendleton hospital with symptoms of back pain, abdominal pain and bilateral lower extremity paralysis. He was 54 and had a “well-documented medical history of pelvic fractures and a deep-vein thrombosis” and was on the anticoagulant Coumadin, according to the lawsuit.

Denton talked to doctors, received a computed tomography — CT — scan and examinations, and doctors noted Denton had a history of abdominal pain, back pain and gall stones. The hospital discharged Denton at around 2:40 a.m. July 7 without determining the cause of the pain in his back and abdomen nor the paralysis.

Denton woke July 7 to more numbness in his legs and with the pain still in his abdomen. The conditions worsened as the day went on until Denton returned to the emergency department, and at about 11:20 p.m. saw Wendler. By then, according to the lawsuit, Denton had lost all sensation and motor strength from his waist down to his feet.

Wendler examined Denton and noted he was unable to move his legs. The doctor at 12:54 a.m. July 8, ordered CT scans. Another doctor saw the scans and noted a lesion on Denton’s spine that may represent a tumor. He advised Denton

undergo a magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, scan.

But St. Anthony was not equipped to perform an MRI and respond to a neurosurgical emergency, the lawsuit states, so Wendler began to arrange to transfer Denton somewhere that could help him. At about 3 a.m. Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, recommended transferring Denton there.

Wendler at 3:25 a.m. arranged for a Pendleton ambulance to take Denton to OSHU rather than on an emergency aircraft. But the ambulance was not dispatched until 7:30 a.m. and left St. Anthony at 7:45 a.m. for the drive to the Portland hospital.

Denton arrived at OHSU at 11:05 a.m. July 8, and had an MRI and neurosurgery consultation. Tests showed Denton’s blood was too thin for surgery. The neurosurgery department at 4:36 p.m. recommended reversing his blood’s condition in anticipation of surgery.

“Plaintiff was taken to the operating room with the hope of decompressing the spinal cord,” according to the lawsuit. “Unfortunately, the procedure failed.”

The spinal epidural hematoma in Denton’s spine expanded with continued bleeding over the course of days, the lawsuit states, and by the time the procedure at OHSU began, the damage it had caused to Denton’s spine was irreversible.

According to the complaint, the substandard care Denton claims he received resulted in delays that led to his suffering neuropathy, nervous system problems with his bladder and urination and permanent paralysis of the legs and lower body. The pleading asks for \$200,000 in economic damages, \$15 million for future treatment and care and \$20 million for noneconomic damages, including emotional and mental pain and distress.

State court records do not yet show responses from St. Anthony Hospital and Wendler.

M-F Wineries peak with Watermill expansion

By HECTOR DEL CASTILLO
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — Interest in wine processing is gaining momentum in Milton-Freewater with construction well underway to expand the already massive Watermill building, on East Broadway Avenue, providing new winemakers with a facility they could use to get started.

The building covers about 100,000 square feet and is shared by Watermill Winery and five other small wine businesses. Expansion will add about 65% more room and the potential for a bigger wine-making hub.

Milton-Freewater City Manager Linda Hall reported she has received more applications for liquor licenses in anticipation of the Watermill expansion.

Watermill winemaker Andrew Brown stated Thursday, Jan. 20, the project is about 70% complete.

“What we’re looking at is servicing people who want to be in the wine industry, in ways that aren’t provided in Milton-Freewater at this time,” Brown said. “Basically, that’s full service wine production from receiving to packaging and everything in the middle, which includes fermentation, analysis, aging wine and barrel.”

Wine processing may not be new to the Walla Walla Valley, which was designated an American Viticultural Area in 1984 and is now home to about 120 wineries in both Southeast Washington and Northeast Oregon. But nestled within its 502 square miles is the relatively young and tiny The Rocks District of Milton-Freewater.

It’s less than 6 square miles and already has 33 wine-growing members since becoming its own AVA in 2015.

The number of members keeps going up.

“It’s a very desirable location because it’s very distinctive,” Walla Walla Valley Wine Executive Director Robert Hansen said. “The grapes they grow there have very noticeable and recognizable traits, and there’s very savory wine qualities that come from the stones of that region. I think it’s desirable due to its uniqueness.”

The Brown family has



Greg Lehman, Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

From left, Israel Zenteno, Studio Production winemaker; Brian Roy, Watermill Brand winemaker; Abe Currin, Studio and Brand cidemaker; and Andrew Brown, founder and general manager at the expanded production facility in Milton-Freewater, Friday, Jan. 21, 2022.

long been preparing for wine processing to catch on around Milton-Freewater.

Watermill was founded in 2005, not long after the Browns planted their first vineyard. That followed more than a century of family farming and commercial apple growing.

“It’s been desired by the industry for a long time,” Andrew Brown said. “I think you’re starting to see more consumer



Brown

interest in the wines that are produced out of the region, so now it’s a little more possible for wineries to put a stake in the ground and produce wines that are recognized.”

More wine business would mean an increase in competition, but Watermill likes the idea.

“The more the merrier, that’s what I say,” Brown stated. “Honestly it’s been something for my family, and for our business, that we’ve hoped for over the past 15 years, to really have a core of winery facilities and tast-

ing rooms that helps drive the industry on our side of the Valley.”

Interest in the Watermill facility, according to Brown, already has come from wine-makers in Walla Walla as well as other parts of Oregon and Washington and even as far south as California.

“We’re set up as to host alternating proprietors,” Brown said.

“Basically what that means is that people who have existing winery licenses in the state of Oregon, or people who want to have a winery license in the state of Oregon, can actually share our space legally. There’s some advantages to that, that would make it a better business strategy.”

“What our facility allows is for startups to basically get licensing without the infrastructure costs of setting up a facility or building.”

Along with increased wine production interest in Milton-Freewater comes

preparations to enhance the experience of consumers.

Tasting rooms would help bring in more tourism dollars, much like Walla Walla has generated from its downtown plaza.

Watermill is expected to unveil an upgraded patio at the winery this spring, with the addition of food service as well as the return of live music.

Across the street from the Watermill Winery is scheduled to be a new Los Roccosos tasting room, with preparations for an opening this spring.

And more continues to develop for Milton-Freewater wines, according to the city manager, who is excited about the possibilities.

“It means notoriety, quite frankly,” Hall said. “I think it’ll eventually be a huge draw. We’re already seeing increases in the numbers of businesses that are coming here with liquor license applications because of that facility. Obviously more jobs, more money at the economy. Always a good thing.”

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