

NJ Casino Secondhand Smoke Suit Settled for \$4.5M

Former NJ casino dealer who said secondhand smoke caused cancer settles lawsuit for \$4.5M

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. December 3, 2010 (AP)

A former casino employee who said his lung cancer was caused by 25 years of exposure to secondhand smoke at work has settled a lawsuit against his ex-employer for \$4.5 million.

Vince Rennich's lawsuit against the Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City became a rallying cry for the ultimately unsuccessful effort to ban smoking in the nation's second-largest gambling market.

"I wanted to have smoking stopped in the casinos; that was my goal," Rennich, of Somers Point, told The Associated Press on Friday. "It was never about money."

Rennich now works at Dover Downs, a smoke-free casino in Delaware. He says the atmosphere there is much better than Atlantic City, where smoking is allowed on 25 percent of the casino floor.

"I've been there six months and it's a pleasure," he said. "A lot of the guys from Atlantic City came down there to work because they couldn't stand the smoke."

The Tropicana declined to comment, noting that the 2006 lawsuit was filed before the current ownership took control of the casino. The lawsuit was settled in September.

The 52-year-old Rennich learned of his cancer in 2005 when he was hospitalized after a car accident. He had one-third of his right lung removed in September of that year, and says he is feeling well nowadays.

Rennich says he has never smoked a cigarette in his life.

He became one of the most visible faces of the movement to ban smoking in Atlantic City's 11 casinos in 2007 and 2008. The city was on the verge of banning smoking, but relented when the economy crashed and casinos worried about losing even more of their business to neighboring states that allow gamblers to smoke.

A compromise under which smoking is banned from 75 percent of the casino floor but allowed on the remaining 25 percent seems to have satisfied no one, but it has been in effect for nearly two years.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of the anti-smoking group Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, said the settlement should be a wake-up call for the casino industry.

"This settlement is the least they can do, having put his life at risk and created this extremely hazardous condition that led to his lung cancer," she said. "It's a long time coming."

Blumenfeld also said Rennich's case should be a catalyst to removing a casino exemption from New Jersey's law that bans smoking inside all other public buildings.

In 2000, Kam Wong, a dealer who had worked for the Claridge Casino Hotel for 10 years, was awarded \$150,000 from a workers' compensation claim for lost wages and medical expenses because of secondhand smoke exposure that contributed to her lung cancer. One of her lungs had to be removed.

"The gaming industry has knowingly harmed the health of their employees and patrons," said



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Stephanie Steinberg, chairwoman of Smoke-Free Gaming of America. "They tell their employees the air is safe and the ventilation is sufficient. And yet, their employees are sick and dying from the toxic, smoke-filled air. The casinos are going to be held accountable and it's going to cost them."

For the time being at least, Rennich plans to continue working at Dover Downs as a pit boss.

"I like what I'm doing down there," he said. "My goal was always to work in a smoke-free casino, and that's finally what I'm doing. Right now I'm pretty happy with my life. I'm happy just to be alive, actually."



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