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## FJD Hires Salvation Army Attorney to Eye CJC Elevator Safety

Max Mitchell, The Legal Intelligencer

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The First Judicial District has hired an attorney handling the Salvation Army building collapse suit to look into the safety of elevators at the Criminal Justice Center, where two elevators malfunctioned and injured two people in early August.

The court system has hired Wapner Newman attorney Steven G. Wigrizer to independently evaluate the CJC elevator system for safety and reliability, a court spokesman said.

Wigrizer's practice is focused on complex civil litigation, including products liability cases, and he is representing numerous plaintiffs suing the Salvation Army and numerous other defendants over a 2013 building collapse that left seven dead and 12 injured. The trial in that case began last week.

Wigrizer's review of the elevators stems from an incident that happened Aug. 4, when one elevator apparently malfunctioned and smashed into the building's ceiling, which sent debris falling onto a second elevator. One court employee was injured and Sheriff's Deputy Paul Owens was paralyzed from the waist down.

Since the incident attorneys have expressed concerns about the building's safety, with many refusing to use the elevators.

First Judicial District spokesman Gabriel Roberts said discussions are ongoing between the courts and the city, which owns the elevators.

"Safety of the public and personnel is the court's paramount concern. The city has informed the courts that their experts concluded the elevators are safe. The city also informed the courts that we will receive copies of all relevant inspection and testing reports shortly, so that we can independently verify this," Roberts said in an emailed statement. "Further, the city represented to the courts that the safety of Stout Center tenants and visitors remains their primary concern."

The two elevators, which were primarily used for judges, have been out of service since the malfunction, and the court has taken steps to try to cope with the changes, including using

elevator operators in the facilities, and only allowing certain elevators to access designated floors.

Worries from many attorneys focused on the fact that all elevators in the building, including the two that malfunctioned, had been inspected and approved for use on June 14. According to the state Department of Labor and Industry, Lower Gwynedd firm PM Associates conducted the inspection.

Many attorneys also have complained about a lack of information regarding the cause of the malfunction. One reason many pointed to for the dearth of information is because of possible litigation.

Dover Elevator Co. manufactured the elevator and equipment components. The architectural and engineering firm that designed the building was Vitetta, which hired Van Deusen and Associates as its elevator consultants on the project.

A spokesman for the city has "taken extensive measures to ensure that the elevators are all operating safely."

"The safety of those in the Stout Center is of utmost concern to the administration," spokesman Mike Dunn said in an emailed statement. "In short, while the city understands the trepidation of employees in the Stout Center with regard to the elevators, the only reason that the elevators are back in service is because experts have found them to be safe."

Wigrizer did not return a call seeking comment.

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