

Porch victim's brother sues city

Blamed in fatal collapse, he charges 'corruption,' negligence' involved

BY NATASHA KORECKI
Federal Courts Reporter

The brother of a victim of the deadly North Side porch collapse accused the Daley administration in a federal lawsuit Thursday of trying to hide its own "corruption" and "negligence" by partly blaming him for the 2003 collapse.

John Koranda, a 24-year-old student at North Central College in Naperville, said the city wanted to get back at him for being an outspoken critic and manufactured claims that he and another party-goer jumped up and down on the porch before it collapsed.

The city filed a lawsuit last month partially blaming the col-

lapse that killed 13 people and injured 60 others on Koranda and William S. Fenton-Hathaway. Koranda's brother Robert was killed in the collapse.

Koranda said the city's lawsuit was filed because he criticized the Building Department for failing to properly inspect and permit city porches. Koranda and his attorneys, Terry Ekl and Jon Loevy, said the city trampled Koranda's First Amendment rights.

City not backing down

"They've tried to blame the wrong person because we're coming after the City of Chicago in this federal courthouse with a club," Ekl said Thursday. "We're going to go after them with every resource we have."

Ekl said in his investigation he has found no one on the porch who saw Koranda or anyone else jumping. Ekl said the one witness who has come forward is a felon trying to skirt legal problems.

But the city isn't backing down, saying Thursday it has reports from five witnesses who say there were people jumping on the porch just before the collapse. The city is still investigating whether more than two people were jumping, Chicago Law Department spokeswoman Jennifer Hoyle said. The city intends to take sworn statements from witnesses who told paramedics or other responders to the scene about the jumping, she said.

"Not everybody knew the names of the individuals; that's why it took 18 months for us to figure this out. We have multiple sources, multiple witnesses, and we did a long, careful investigation before we filed this case," Hoyle said. "We only filed against the two individuals who we were able to identify from various witness reports."

Koranda denies jumping and said the city's accusations only compound the anguish he has felt over losing his brother.

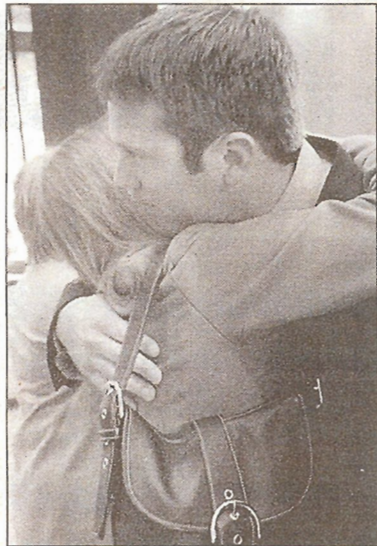
"I think the city knows it's at fault. The city can't be trying to strong-arm people and trying to throw their weight around," Koranda said. "[The Building Department] had two years to make changes, and it was last year when they hired a 19-year-old [as a building inspector]."

'Lawsuit is not about money'

Loevy said one of the first things attorneys will do is ask the city to disclose who made the decision to sue Koranda.

Ekl said the city is shifting the blame instead of tackling its own failures.

"This lawsuit is not about money. We could care less about getting money," Ekl said. "What we care about is the City of Chicago stopping the way they do business. And the way they do business is to tolerate incompetence and corruption, and when you get caught with a problem, you blame somebody else."



John Koranda hugs his sister Katie Tanaka after a news conference to announce his suit against the city. —JEAN LACHAT/SUN-TIMES