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Suit over frat death settled

By Howard Pankratz
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The mother of University of Colorado student Lynn "Gordie" Bailey, who died of acute alcohol poisoning in September 2004 following a fraternity initiation ritual, has settled her lawsuit with the fraternity on the eve of the trial that was to start this week.

Denver lawyer Bruce Jones, who represented Leslie Lanahan, Bailey's mother, said a settlement was reached with both the Chi Psi fraternity and the Alpha Psi Delta Corporation of Chi Psi, which owned the fraternity house in Boulder.

Jones said the amount of the monetary settlement is confidential.

"I think it is a good and appropriate settlement," said Jones. "There are a number of things the fraternity has agreed to do to help police drinking and avoid these types of things in the future by how they handled pledging and initiation events and the like."

Bailey died on the morning of Sept. 17, 2004, of

acute alcohol poisoning. His blood-alcohol level was 0.328 percent.

The night before, he and 26 other Chi Psi fraternity pledges at CU were blindfolded and taken to the woods near Gold Hill, west of Boulder, as part of an initiation ritual.

The pledges were told to drink large amounts of whiskey and wine, police said at the time. After he was driven back to the fraternity, Bailey lapsed into unconsciousness.

None of the fraternity members called 911 for hours afterwards. Instead, some scrawled vulgar phrases and drawings on his body.

Jones said that one reason he believes the settlement was appropriate was because all a jury can do is decide liability and award damages. A settlement, on the other hand, can bring reform.

"This settlement resulted in some agreements that I think will ultimately be of benefit to the fraternity and to future fraternity members because it could well result in saving lives," said Jones.

The fraternity has agreed to do a number of different things that will "reduce the likelihood of a future death from alcohol poisoning like occurred with Gordie," he said.

"From that standpoint, I'm very pleased with this outcome," said Jones. "The Lanahans have said on more than one occasion that the lawsuit

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wasn't about money. And the agreement they end up arriving at with the fraternities really reflects that was a truthful statement - that they wanted reform and change."

Jones said that Lanahan reached settlement with several individual members of the fraternity about a year ago.

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