

## Second ATO fire lawsuit reaches settlement

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by Errol Castens/Daily Journal Oxford Bureau

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OXFORD – A lawsuit over the 2004 fraternity-house fire that killed three students at the University of Mississippi has been settled in principle.

Jordan Williams of Atlanta, Ga., Howard Stone of Spencer, Va., and Will Townsend of Clarksdale died in an early-morning fire at Ole Miss' Alpha Tau Omega house on Aug. 27, 2004.

William M. Quin II, attorney for Jimmy L. Williams, Jordan Williams' father, said their lawsuit, which was to have gone to trial April 30, has been "settled in principle." He noted that fulfillment of the agreed-to terms is pending but he expects within several weeks that papers will be filed with Lafayette County Circuit Court asking for the case to be dismissed.

Quin would not disclose the terms of the settlement, but informed legal observers say with punitive damages, which were requested in the complaint, the settlement could be as much as \$10 million.

Grady Tollison, an Oxford attorney whose firm represented the ATO entities, declined to comment, citing confidentiality requirements. Jackson attorney W. Scott Welch III, representing ATO National, also said no comment.

Quin said he hopes the 2007 suit has a long-term impact on safety awareness and procedures.

"The goal of any lawsuit, especially in a case such as this, is that you seek not only to compensate your client, but to prevent repeat of the mistakes that led to the loss," he said. He noted that when ATO rebuilt its house, it was equipped with a sprinkler system.

"The extent to which they have maintained safety systems, I hope they keep that up," Quin said.

Today, though, only seven of 14 Ole Miss fraternity houses have sprinkler systems, the Daily Journal learned last week. All UM sorority houses and public residence halls have sprinklers due to a 2005 legislative mandate passed in response to the ATO fire.

The Stone family's suit against the national ATO organization, the local chapter and the house corporation was settled out of court last year, with terms undisclosed.

William Liston III of Jackson, attorney for the Stone family, and Tollison both declined to speak about that case.

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