

MEMORANDUM

Re: New Evidence in the Death of Yoni Gottesman

This memo highlights new evidence demonstrating that Jonathan "Yoni" Gottesman's death was preventable by Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club ("COAC") had they simply checked the references of their life guards involved in Yoni's death. There is also recent evidence gathered that overwhelmingly shows that COAC ownership knowingly cut corners on safety issues to maximize profits.

I. Brief Statement of Facts

Yoni Gottesman was four years old when he died on August 15, 2005. He drowned in the COAC swimming pool in plain view of, and only a few feet away from, two lifeguards and three camp counselors while he attended what turned out to be an unlicensed day care program at the facility. Yoni's death was captured on video by a security surveillance camera, which shows (1) a COAC counselor aggressively "dunking" children in the pool; (2) immediately after a round of dunking, all of the figures swimming away from the site except one: a single child's form is seen briefly struggling to stay afloat and then going prone; and (3) Yoni floating face down for *eight minutes* without anyone taking any notice of him.¹ It was only when another child noticed Yoni floating in the pool that anyone took any action to save him. The action taken was too little, too late. Even if Yoni could have been saved when he was pulled from the pool, the COAC staff used improper resuscitation and CPR techniques and equipment on Yoni. Mis-communications and misrepresentations to paramedics only compounded the problems. Yoni was pronounced dead upon arrival at the local hospital.

II. COAC Was Criminally Negligent In Its Failure To Screen Its Lifeguards

The evidence recently gathered demonstrates that COAC never checked the references of the lifeguards who contributed to the death of Yoni Gottesman.

¹ Rather than review the original hard drive, the DA utilized lower-quality video CD's. This not only rendered the video less useful, it also apparently led to the DA's report referencing a slightly different time line (by approximately 8 to 10 seconds) than what is shown on the original hard drive.

January 26, 2007, declaration of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is the membership activities director of the [REDACTED] Country Club, and former employer of COAC lifeguard, David Merin.² [REDACTED]'s full statement was given under oath and is attached as Exhibit 1). In the summer of 2005, the [REDACTED] Country Club employed Merin as a lifeguard. [REDACTED] declared in relevant part:

- “Merin was terminated” because he was “a risk.” “[Merin] was not focused and seemed to be inattentive while he was on duty.” [REDACTED] ¶ 4).
- “...Merin appeared like he was not interested in the role of a lifeguard.” ([REDACTED] ¶ 5).
- “[Merin] was advised that his lack of attention poolside was considered a safety issue, and reminded that as a lifeguard, he was responsible for the safety of our members and their guests in the pool. Despite these admonitions, Mr. Merin failed to perform...” [REDACTED] ¶ 7).
- “In August of 2005, after being counseled regarding his performance, Mr. Merin was apparently unable to perform his job functions in a manner that his supervisor [REDACTED] was comfortable with, and he was terminated...” [REDACTED] ¶ 8).
- “I understand that Mr. Merin, shortly after his termination, was hired as a lifeguard at the Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club. No representative of the Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club contacted the [REDACTED] Country Club, myself, or [REDACTED] in order to verify his employment or check his references.” [REDACTED] ¶ 9).

COAC's failure to contact the references of Merin are criminal, particularly given the short time within which, Merin was back lifeguarding children after being fired for safety concerns from the [REDACTED] Country Club. COAC's failure to check prior employment and references of its lifeguards is not an isolated incident. COAC has failed to contact references of every prior lifeguard we have obtained interviews with so far.

January 26, 2007, interview of [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was employed as a lifeguard in 2004 and 2005 for COAC. In 2006 she was employed solely as a swimming instructor. On August 15, 2005, [REDACTED]

² Merin was a lifeguard present and “on duty” on August 15, 2005. The video of Yoni's death shows that Merin did nothing to save Yoni for the first *six minutes* Yoni is floating in the water; he then *walks right past where Yoni is floating face-down and motionless in the pool and leaves the pool deck to get a soda*. He does not return to the pool area until after Yoni is pulled from the pool.

was present at COAC and not acting as a lifeguard. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] stated in relevant part,

- “When I interviewed at Cathedral Oaks, Esther Clark [Aquatics Director] never even looked at my certifications. She never called my references. She never asked me to demonstrate my ability.” [REDACTED]
- “The club [COAC] never acknowledged any responsibility for anything, even though this accident could have been prevented.” [REDACTED]
- “When I first started working as a lifeguard at the club, I was blown away by the way that the Aquatics Department was run... There was a “half-assed hiring process.” [REDACTED]

III. COAC Cut Corners On Safety To Maximize Profits

[REDACTED] and October 20, 2006,
declaration of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is the former director of COAC’s activity camp. She was employed by COAC from September 2003 - September 2004. [REDACTED] declaration given under oath are attached as Exhibit 3).

- “...Charlotte Valentine [COAC manager] and COAC management cared only about the revenue generated by the camp.” ([REDACTED] Declaration, ¶ 27).
- “When I was hired, it was made very clear to me that money was an issue. I was told, in no uncertain terms, that I was to keep expenses down and that any cost that I incurred would come out of my department’s budget.” ([REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 14).
- “The directors of each department...were paid commission-like bonuses based on the net profits of their departments.” ([REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 15).
- “There was a personal financial motive for the department heads and the club manager to minimize spending, and they did that, even at the expense of safety and hygiene. *The club was about the money, not the kids.*” ([REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 15).
- “The club’s obsession with profits extended into the hiring and staffing of the club, as well. In retrospect, I was probably not the ideal candidate to be the

Director of the activity camp. I didn't have any experience with that type of operation and, really, I had no idea what I was doing. I think that I was just a warm body that was willing to work for the wage that they were offering. I didn't have any training or licensing or anything. [REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 3).

- “[COAC] were much less concerned about hiring qualified, capable people than they were about making sure that their hourly salary requirements were adhered to.” [REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 22).
- The Aquatics department was “driven by profit.” “I would expect that an aquatics director to take a proactive role in making sure that her area, her department, was safe for everyone, and she [Esther Clark] didn't do that.” ([REDACTED]; see also Declaration, ¶ 18).
- “After being there for a year and realizing that the place was all about making money, I decided...to move on. I felt like that place was an accident waiting to happen and I didn't want to be there when it did. I gave my notice.” [REDACTED] see also Declaration, ¶ 26).

January 26, 2007, interview of [REDACTED]:

- “I could have been a truck driver from Minneapolis for all [Esther Clark] knew....She was mostly just interested in whether or not I would work for the wage that they were offering.... [s]he didn't seek to hire the best candidates; just the ones that would work for what she was offering.” [REDACTED]).
- “The pay isn't good, and [COAC] always cutting corners to conserve their budget. [The lifeguards] weren't well trained and weren't ready for any real emergency.” [REDACTED]
- “It was obvious to me that the decisions [no new spine-board, adequately supplied first aid kit, properly equipped lifeguards, and proper time procedures] that Esther made within that department were made by a desire to keep her expenses down.” [REDACTED]
- “It was very clear that lifeguard scheduling was done based on the budget, not on safety concerns.” [REDACTED]
- “It was clear to me that the club's primary concern was profit, and I firmly believe that if they had taken the time and money to hire the right people and provide the proper tools and training, this could've been avoided.” [REDACTED]

January 26, 2007, interview of Jennie Darling

Ms. Darling was employed at COAC as a Camp Counselor in the Winter of 2004 and the Summer 2005 camp where Yoni died. Ms. Darling stated that COAC placed financial concerns over the safety of its employees and guests. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- “We (activity camp) used the pool, but there were no lifeguards on duty during the winter session.” [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
- Ms. Darling also complained to COAC about safety issues of “rats” and “holes in the field next to the trailer” with the children. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

1 their guests in the pool. Despite these admonitions, Mr. Merin failed to perform to the standard
2 that was expected of him, causing his supervisor to doubt his ability to act as a lifeguard.

3 8. In August of 2005, after being counseled regarding his performance, Mr. Merin was
4 apparently unable to perform his job functions in a manner that his supervisor was comfortable
5 with, and he was terminated from the [REDACTED] Country Club. Mr. Merin's termination was
6 effected with my knowledge, consent, and approval.

7 9. I understand that Mr. Merin, shortly after his termination, was hired as a lifeguard at the
8 Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club. No representative of the Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club contacted
9 the [REDACTED] County Club, myself, or [REDACTED] in order to verify his employment or check his
10 references.

11 10. If a representative from the Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club, or any other facility
12 considering hiring Mr. Merin as a lifeguard, had contacted the [REDACTED] County Club, I would
13 have advised the caller of Mr. Merin's shortcomings and cautioned against placing him in a role
14 wherein responsibility for, and safety of, persons in a swimming pool would be placed in his care.

15 11. I have no personal animosity towards Mr. Merin; however, his history of inattention and
16 substandard performance as a lifeguard precluded the continuation of his employment at the
17 [REDACTED] County Club. As a service to any facility seeking to employ Mr. Merin as such, I
18 would have advised against hiring him in that capacity, for that reason.

19 I declare under the penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the
20 foregoing is true and correct.

21 Executed this 26th day of January 2007, in Santa Barbara, California.
22
23
24
25

[REDACTED]

Declarant initials [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1 5. I brought the matter of the mouse infestation to the attention of the club manager,
2 Charlotte Valentine, and the maintenance man, Stefan. Ms. Valentine's solution was to instruct
3 Stefan to cover the holes in the trailer; however, no attempt to exterminate the trailer was ever
4 made, despite my warnings that the rodents posed a safety concern and a hygienic problem. No
5 traps were ever placed in the trailer, and no effort to control the rodent infestation was made,
6 beyond covering the holes. I believe that a state licensed facility with these types of problems
7 would have been closed down immediately.

8 6. Additionally, the trailer and the children's activity camp had no water or restroom
9 facilities. I brought this matter to Charlotte Valentine's attention. The solution to this problem
10 was to run a hose from a nearby spigot to a makeshift plastic sink near the trailer. There was no
11 plumbing, and therefore, no drainage, and as a result, any material that was washed into the sink
12 subsequently wound up on the ground. There was no hot water, and no restroom facility was
13 ever provided, although Ms. Valentine did offer to install a Port-a-Potty, which I declined to
14 accept on the grounds that it was not a sanitary or effective solution to the problem.

15 7. There were also several safety concerns that I brought to the attention of the athletic club,
16 and to Charlotte Valentine specifically. A chain link fence was erected around the area where the
17 children's activity campers frequently ate lunch. Prior to the beginning of the camp sessions, a
18 section of the fence had collapsed, and provided a means by which a child could easily crawl
19 over it and into a nearby creek bed or by which someone could enter the children's area from the
20 outside. In fact, both of those events did occur, as the problem was never corrected, despite my
21 concerns.

22 8. On one occasion, a woman and her two children entered through this section of
23 dilapidated fencing. I confronted the woman, who claimed to be a member on her way to the
24 athletic club facilities. On a number of other occasions, I observed campers in my charge
25 attempting to negotiate the fence and "escape." This hazard presented a serious risk of injury to a

Declarant initials: [REDACTED]

