

News

IMETTE'S FAMILY TO SUE BOUNCER'S BAR - GRIEVING MOM'S JUSTICE CRUSADE

Murray Weiss

911 words

12 May 2006

New York Post

5

English

(c) 2006 N.Y.P. Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.

The family of slain criminal-justice student **Imette St. Guillen** - vowing a relentless crusade for justice - plans to sue the bar owners who hired the ex-con bouncer accused of abducting and brutally killing the vivacious young beauty.

They also are targeting state and federal agencies that were supposed to be supervising the bouncer, who was on parole on an armed-robbery rap at the time of the bloodshed.

The family has hired high-powered lawyer Joseph Tacopina, who says he will file an array of civil "notices of claim" next week. One of them will cite the trendy SoHo bar The Falls, where three-time loser Darryl Littlejohn guarded the door.

Tacopina also plans to sue The Falls' owner, who is not identified in the papers. Previous reports have said the tavern is owned by John and Michael Dorrian, as well as Daniel Dorrian, who was tending bar that night.

Tacopina and the family's Boston-based lawyer, Chris Lang, said the notices don't mention the dollar amount that will be sought; they have to be filed to protect their right to sue later.

The family insists money is not the point.

Maureen St. Guillen, the young woman's mother, told The Post the family wants to see changes in the law to fix cracks in a porous system that allowed Littlejohn to be hired in the first place.

"We can not undo what was done to Imette," her mother said in an exclusive interview. "But we cannot let that stop us from trying to help other people by getting regulatory and legislative changes so that people are accountable for what they do, or what they don't do."

State law bans the hiring of convicted felons as bouncers, but doesn't require bar owners to do background checks on prospective employees.

The family, already scheduling meetings with state lawmakers, wants a legal requirement for background checks - at bar owners' expense.

"Change is needed here and if people ask at what cost, I say, 'What cost, or amount of money, can you put on your child's life?' " she said. "I would not want anyone else to go through this. It is the worst possible thing imaginable."

The family also is calling for increased funding to hire more parole officers to reduce their workload, for enhanced communication and technology so that various agencies can easily and quickly share information, and for the installation of surveillance cameras outside bars.

Imette, a 24-year-old John Jay College honors student, vanished early on the morning of Feb. 25; she was last seen hours earlier at The Falls. Her nude body, wrapped in a blanket and tied with clear packing tape, was found that night in a desolate section of Brooklyn.

During the early stages of the NYPD investigation, Daniel Dorrian allegedly failed to tell detectives all he knew about Imette's movements before she disappeared.

Days later, he finally divulged to police that Imette did not leave alone - and that bouncer Littlejohn was the last person with her. Two weeks after the slaying, Littlejohn was formally charged with her killing after his DNA was linked to the crime.

It marked the second time in 20 years a bar owned by the Dorrian clan has figured into a high-profile slaying. Dorrian's Red Hand was the last stop for Jennifer Levin before she was brutally beaten in Central Park by Robert Chambers in the notorious 1986 "Preppy Murder."

Maureen St. Guillen said employers need to be more vigilant.

"When you go for a job interview, I can't understand, you put down your reference and someone should check your background for any job you apply for," she noted.

"That is a very basic thing that should be done. And they need to get all the answers they need before hiring someone.

"And it goes beyond restaurants and bars. It goes to schools. It goes to everyone's basic security. Whenever you hire anyone, they should be checked out fully, to anyone who deals with young adults, children. People need to be more responsible in terms of hiring." Imette's mom believes her daughter's death connected with so many people because they recognized Imette's goodness and that she was the kind of daughter everyone wished they had.

She said her family only recently turned their attention to the loopholes and foul-ups that contributed to Imette's death, as they were consumed initially with her loss.

"The grieving process does not get any easier and it gets more difficult as you try to seek some positive changes," she said.

Maureen St. Guillen said she had never been concerned about her daughter living in the Big Apple - and doesn't blame the city for her loss now. The Boston native came to New York in August 2004 to study forensic psychology at John Jay.

"I think New York is the place to be and I love the way New Yorkers are resilient and make themselves stronger," she added. "And I don't think New York is any less safe than any other area."

Imette St. Guillen (right) was slain allegedly by Darryl Littlejohn (far left), a bouncer at The Falls. Her mom, Maureen, (lower left) is set to sue bar co-owner Michael Dorrian (left). [Boston Herald; Ellis Kaplan; N.Y. Post: Spencer A. Burnett]

Document NYPO000020060512e25c0002o