

RBG suing caterer after food poisoning

BY JACQUIE DE ALMEIDA

The Royal Botanical Gardens is suing a catering company and its owner for \$1.1 million after 150 people suffered food poisoning following a Mother's Day brunch.

In a statement of claim, the RBG is seeking \$500,000 for breach of contract from Compton & Greenland Fine Foods Catering of Hamilton and \$500,000 from Kathryn Greenland for negligence. Both defendants are also facing \$100,000 in exemplary damages "to discourage such conduct by others."

Three hundred people attended the May 8 brunch, feasting on meats, salads and pastries. About 150 people became sick with salmonella. Public health officials have spent weeks tracking people down, surveying what they ate to pinpoint the source of the bacteria.

The RBG suit comes on the heels of a \$1-million lawsuit filed May 30 on behalf of a Caledonia man who is suing the gardens and the catering company for negligence and breach of duty.

A lawyer for the plaintiff said he's re-

ceived calls from 15 other people who suffered salmonella poisoning and expects to register the suit as a class action.

Statements of claim must be proven in court.

An inspection of the facilities May 15 and 16 found problems with food storage, preparation and handling. Health officials laid seven charges against the caterer.

The RBG says fallout from the salmonella poisoning has hurt the gardens' reputation for hosting weddings, corporate meetings and other special events. Customers have cancelled bookings, costing the cash-strapped centre vital revenue.

Greenland said she has never had a problem with food preparation or handling in her 16 years as a caterer, nine of which she spent serving and preparing food as the picturesque gardens' exclusive caterer.

"I have absolutely no idea how any of this happened," she said on the weekend. "This was our ninth Mother's Day brunch. Sixteen years and not a single person has (complained)."

Greenland has retained a lawyer and

plans to fight the lawsuits.

The RBG alleges the catering company:

- Did not promptly disclose reports of food-borne illness relating to the Mother's Day event or disclose information of an investigation launched by the Halton Region Health Department;

- Misrepresented the reason for closing its facilities on May 18, citing equipment maintenance rather than a health department requirement that catering staff be trained in food services handling procedures;

- Failed to comply with insurance requirements of the contract.

Greenland said she was stunned to hear of the lawsuit and feels betrayed by the RBG.

"It's a horrible, horrible mess and I feel absolutely appalled. If I treated a client like this, I wouldn't feel good about myself. I stood by them when they were going through (tough times)" she said.

Greenland said she's been leaning on family and friends for support.

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