



FORT WORTH

## Company 'skipped town' to avoid paying \$1 million to DFW bus crash victims, suit says

BY KALEY JOHNSON

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FORT WORTH — A Fort Worth couple seriously injured in a fatal bus crash in 2013 are suing the bus company, claiming the company has not paid them their \$1 million judgment and instead took the money for themselves.

In 2013, Stephen and Marcia Cassillo were on their way to the Choctaw Casino in Oklahoma when the driver, Loyd Reive, blacked out at the wheel, according to reports at the time. The bus veered into guard barrels, swerved across multiple lanes, hit a concrete barrier and flipped over near Dallas.

Three people were killed.

Stephen Cassillo broke his neck in the wreck, said the Cassillos' lawyer, Robert Haslam. Marcia Cassillo was also seriously injured.

In 2017, a Tarrant County jury ordered the Cardinal Coach Line Company of Mansfield to pay the couple \$1 million. As of November, the Cassillos had not received any part of that judgment, Haslam said.

On Thursday, the Cassillos filed a lawsuit against the bus company in Tarrant County, saying the shareholders of the company purposefully cleared the company's bank account for themselves after the bus crash.

The suit says the company sold buses and other assets and spread the money out among relatives instead of paying creditors, such as the Cassillos. The suit specifically named Matt and Teresa Biran, owners of the company, as defendants.

"They got our demand and they got several demands and instead of trying to figure out how to pay the claimants, they just took the money out for themselves," Haslam said. "It's like they skipped town."

The Birans could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

Haslam said the Birans paid themselves and their relatives with money that should have been used to compensate those in the bus crash.

The suit lists \$132,000 worth of loans paid out from the bus company to the Birans in 2014.

"Instead of attempting to resolve all the claims through a payment plan or other resolution, the Defendants looted the company, paying themselves and family money from corporate assets," the lawsuit states.

The bus driver, Rieve, was also part of the judgment for the Cassillos. According to previous court filings, Rieve blacked out at the wheel due to a known medical condition. He is also supposed to pay part of the \$1 million for the Cassillos and has not done so.

At the time that Rieve was driving the 45 passengers in April 2013, he was supposed to be at a doctor's appointment for previous blackout spells he had, the lawsuit says.

"He knew he was putting these people's lives in danger and he did it anyway," Haslam said.

The Cassillos received a confidential amount from Choctaw Nation due to the crash. Cardinal Bus Line's insurance company offered the Cassillos \$50,000, but they did not feel it was a fair amount, Haslam said.

"Their injuries are permanent," Haslam said. "He's had neck surgery to try and repair the damage. He's very fragile."

In 2016, a Dallas County jury ordered the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma to pay \$11 million to the families of two women from Fort Worth and North Richland Hills who were killed in the crash.

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A school bus with 36 children inside was involved in a crash with another vehicle, Thursday, June 28, in downtown Fort Worth, Texas. No injuries were reported, Fort Worth police said.

By **Prescotte Stokes III** ✉

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