

# Alarm company reaches \$2.5M settlement with N.J. hotel worker who was attacked by mentally ill man

Published: Monday, June 14, 2010, 6:24 PM Updated: Monday, June 14, 2010, 6:25 PM



Alexi Friedman/The Star-Ledger

**CARLSTADT** — Kimberly Grajales was working the overnight shift as a clerk at the Hampton Inn in Carlstadt when a mentally disturbed man climbed over the front desk and attacked her. Grajales managed to push the panic button on the wall, and thought police would soon arrive. No one came.

The silent alarm at the Bergen County hotel had been broken for months, and Grajales ended up struggling with her attacker for 30 minutes before escaping to another guest's room, where she dialed 911. A hotel surveillance camera captured the 4 a.m. incident, which happened on July 4, 2008. The attacker nearly bit off Grajales' finger, and the panic button was stained with her blood, local police said.

On Friday, Vanwell Electronics, the alarm company that installed and maintained the hotel's security system, agreed to pay Grajales \$2.5 million to settle her lawsuit. The deal came before the second day of trial in Superior Court in Newark, civil division, and with Grajales set to testify, her attorney said.

"Vanwell knew for 16 weeks the (security) line wasn't properly connected and did nothing about it," said her lawyer, David Mazie, who filed the claim in Essex County because Vanwell also conducts business there.

Grajales, now 25 lives in Roselle and is on disability. "This has affected every aspect of her life two years down the line," Mazie said. "There are lasting psychological issues."

A judge dismissed a related claim against Criticom Monitoring Services, which Vanwell paid to oversee security system maintenance. Criticom had repeatedly advised Vanwell in the weeks leading up to the incident that Hampton Inn's panic button wasn't working.

Vanwell, a subsidiary of the publicly traded Somerset International Group, did not respond to messages left at its North Plainfield office or an e-mail sent to its president, Lance Berkheimer.

Kenneth Gough, who police arrested shortly after the attack, was charged with aggravated sexual assault. Gough, 54, of Cincinnati, told authorities he was looking for work as a horse trainer at

nearby Meadowlands Racetrack. Last year, he was found not guilty by reason of insanity, and was placed in a Bergen County institution.

**Recent Carlstadt coverage:**



Google MapsA map view of Hampton Inn in Carlstadt, where a hotel worker was attacked by a mentally ill man, and used a broken panic button, thinking police would come.

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