

N.Y. / REGION

Suit Details Firing and Suicide of 92nd Street Y Director

By JAMES BARRON SEPT. 23, 2014

The event raised \$4.2 million and featured a performance by the singer Jennifer Hudson, but that is not what Deborah Adler mentions when she thinks back to the 92nd Street Y's spring gala in May 2013. "Several board members came over to me and said he needs to take a little time off — he's looking a little tired," she recalled on Tuesday.

They were talking about her husband, Sol Adler, the 92nd Street Y's executive director. Within three months, the Y would fire him, issuing a statement saying he had had an affair with another employee. Later, he would attempt suicide.

He would try again in March 2014, and in May he would hang himself from a staircase in the Adlers' Brooklyn home.

On Tuesday, Mrs. Adler filed a lawsuit against the 92nd Street Y, claiming contract violations and employment discrimination. The lawsuit says the 92nd Street Y "turned its back on Mr. Adler immediately upon learning that he had been diagnosed with depression," and fired him after a reporter from The Daily News called to ask why he had taken a medical leave.

The pressures had been building, Mrs. Adler said in an interview. Hurricane Sandy had damaged their house in the fall of 2012, and by May 2013, Mr. Adler, who was 60 when he died, had told the board that he had received a diagnosis of depression. He began what the lawsuit says was a

disability leave in mid-June and was hospitalized in July.

“With all this that went on, the affair and everything,” Mrs. Adler said on Tuesday, “his family stood by him.”

In papers filed in State Supreme Court in Manhattan, Mrs. Adler said the way the 92nd Street Y handled his dismissal “served only to exacerbate Mr. Adler’s depression, which led to multiple suicide attempts.”

In the lawsuit and in the interview, Mrs. Adler said her husband had been fired over the telephone. She said Fred Poses, a 92nd Street Y board member, was on the line with her and said Mr. Adler had a choice: Resign or be fired.

She said she told Mr. Poses that Mr. Adler could not come to the phone because he was not there — he had been hospitalized for depression. She said Mr. Poses’s reply was, “Well, in that case, he is fired.”

A call to Mr. Poses’s office was not returned on Tuesday. In response to Mrs. Adler’s lawsuit, a spokeswoman for the 92nd Street Y said: “These claims are baseless. Sol Adler was fired for cause, and we will defend against the lawsuit vigorously.”

Mrs. Adler’s lawyer, Douglas H. Wigdor of Wigdor L.L.P., said Mr. Adler’s contract stated that he could be let go only for cause, and only if he had been given 30 days’ notice and had failed to remedy the issue in that time. He said that the Y gave Mr. Adler no notice, and that Mr. Adler had told the Y about his depression.

Mrs. Adler said he had received the diagnosis in March 2013. As winter turned to spring, Mrs. Adler said, he was “worn” but continued to function at the Y.

“Whatever was going on in his mind, he managed to hold it together for the Y,” she said. “His priority was always the Y. If he needed to take some time off but he needed to be there for something, he pushed himself and put the Y ahead.”

They had met as undergraduates at Brooklyn College in the early 1970s. She had noticed him in history class, and after the final exam, she asked him to drive her home. He had long black hair and a mustache — and a Volvo.

“He told me to put on my seatbelt,” she said.

After graduation, Mr. Adler took a job with a health insurance company, his wife said. Before long, he heard from Reynold Levy, who was the executive director of the 92nd Street Y at the time. Mr. Adler had worked at the Shorefront Y in Brooklyn when Mr. Levy ran a program there for teenagers. Mr. Levy asked if Mr. Adler would be interested in working at the 92nd Street Y.

Mr. Adler was promoted through the ranks, becoming executive director in 1988. The employment contract at issue was signed in December 2011 and ran through September 2015. The lawsuit seeks \$2.8 million, including \$790,000 in salary for the time between his dismissal and the end of the contract, \$230,000 in pension and retirement benefits and \$1.7 million in what the contract called “post-employment benefits.”

The statement the Y issued after Mr. Adler’s dismissal last year followed a statement about an anonymous letter to the Y that said a former manager had demanded payments from vendors. The Y said that the manager had left before the anonymous letter arrived. The Y also said the results of an internal investigation had been turned over to the Manhattan district attorney’s office, which began its own investigation. A spokeswoman for the district attorney would not comment on its status on Tuesday.

The statement did not name the manager but said he was the son-in-law of Catherine Marto, the Y’s liaison for board and donor relations. The statement said that Ms. Marto had been fired for “incomplete or inaccurate answers to investigators” and that she and Mr. Adler had been having “an undisclosed long-term relationship.”

“Accordingly,” the statement said, “the board decided that it would relieve Mr. Adler of his responsibilities.”

Mrs. Adler’s lawsuit says the 92nd Street Y had no policy barring personal relationships between employees and no policy requiring employees to tell the board if they were involved with other employees. Mr. Wigdor said the affair had ended before Mr. Adler was fired. Efforts to reach Ms. Marto on Tuesday were unavailing.

The lawsuit says that Mr. Adler attempted suicide soon after he read a letter from the Y's law firm in August 2013. That letter, according to the lawsuit, said he had lied during an interview with a lawyer for the Y. "This is untrue," the lawsuit says.

He hanged himself 10 days after the Y announced a new executive director, Henry Timms.

A version of this article appears in print on September 24, 2014, on page A26 of the New York edition with the headline: Suit Details Firing and Suicide of 92nd Street Y Director.
