



Suit: 9/11 memorial staffer fired for citing concerns about security, health at the site

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NEW YORK — A former manager at the Sept. 11 memorial was fired for raising health and security concerns at one of the most security-conscious places in the world, he said in a lawsuit Friday.

Thomas Cancelliere maintained he was fired from his job as director of the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum in retaliation for alerting his bosses to numerous problems.

But a memorial spokesman called Cancelliere's claims untrue and said his firing was the result of bad performance on the job. He said Cancelliere was trying to leverage a large financial settlement.

"Tom Cancelliere was terminated because of his documented failure to live up to the performance standards of our organization ... We assure that the memorial is a safe, secure place," spokesman Michael Frazier said.

Cancelliere said he told his bosses of illness-causing bacteria in the memorial's signature fountains, too-narrow exit gates that could hinder an evacuation, and a lack of security checks at a public parking garage directly below the off-site room where the memorial's millions of visitors are screened.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Cancelliere's concern for the safety of visitors was not shared by his supervisors," who told him the issues weren't his responsibility or were being addressed, even though they weren't, his lawsuit said.

Cancelliere, 67, was fired last month. At the time, his bosses cited cost-cutting, the suit said.

The suit was filed in a Manhattan state court, and seeks unspecified damages under the state whistle-blower-protection law.

The nonprofit memorial foundation spent about \$28 million last year and is ramping up to lay out \$60 million a year once an accompanying museum opens, including about \$12 million a year on security.

Cancelliere is well versed in the security concerns that envelop the memorial site: He's a retired plant and facilities manager for the World Trade Center, where the memorial plaza now stands. He left the government agency that runs the trade center in 1996, held other jobs and then started in November 2010 as facilities chief for the privately run memorial, which has drawn more than 4.5 million visitors since its outdoor plaza opened in September 2011.

The next summer, he noted to his boss that no one was examining cars at the garage under the memorial's "welcome site," where visitors go through security checks in a residential building down the block from the memorial itself, the lawsuit said. An elaborate vehicle security center is being built at the trade center site itself, where a truck bomb in an underground garage killed six people and injured nearly 1,000 in a 1993 terrorist attack.

Police have a heavy presence throughout the area near the trade center site.

His boss told him it wasn't his job to worry about security at the screening room garage, according to the lawsuit.

"Here he is, as the director of facilities, and has a right to be concerned about the issues," said his lawyer, Douglas H. Wigdor.

This year, Cancelliere told his supervisor the fountains' disinfecting system wasn't built properly, and the water contained bacteria that cause Legionnaire's disease, Cancelliere's lawsuit said.

People can get the disease from breathing in contaminated water vapor, though most people exposed to the bacteria don't become ill, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Cancelliere's boss said the issue would be handled, but nothing was done, the suit said.

Frazier said Legionnaire's bacteria was never found in the water. He said an algae problem was resolved and posed no danger. "The water is perfectly safe," the spokesman said.

As for the exit gates, Frazier said they had passed muster in a roster of regulatory reviews.

Cancelliere's troubles came to a head after two memorial security guards complained this fall that the screening room was overcrowded and badly ventilated, the lawsuit said. Cancelliere says he told superiors the complaints were on-target, and he recommended air tests, crowd control and other measures.

He was told the issue was being resolved and he shouldn't worry about it, according to the suit. When Cancelliere pressed, he was chastised that he needed to "get along better" with his colleagues, his suit said. He was fired about two weeks later.

Through his lawyer, Cancelliere declined to be interviewed.