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BREAKING NEWS

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1st lawsuit filed in fatal Irving bus crash

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BY DEANNA BOYD
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Less than a week after a casino-bound charter bus crashed in Irving, killing two women and injuring 41 passengers, the first lawsuit has been filed against the bus company.

Charlotte Reed, a 74-year-old Fort Worth woman whose injuries from the wreck included three broken ribs, is suing Cardinal Coach Lines, Inc. of Mansfield on the grounds that the company and bus driver, Loyd Rieve, were negligent. Rieve is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

Matt Biran, owner of the bus company, hung up on a *Star-Telegram* reporter seeking comment about the lawsuit Monday afternoon.

Eleven patients who were injured in the crash remained hospitalized Monday at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, a hospital spokeswoman said. Only one was still in critical condition, down from six on Friday.

Conditions for the other patients were not available, she said.

The bus was bound for the Choctaw Casino in Durant, Okla. when officials say it veered across Texas 161 in Irving Thursday morning, flipping on its side after striking a concrete barrier.

The cause of the crash was still under investigation Monday, said Sgt. Lonny Haschel, a spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The suit was filed Monday afternoon in Dallas County by San Antonio attorney Tim Maloney.

Maloney, who had been involved in two other charter bus lawsuits in the past three years, said he filed the law suit Monday to quicken up the time that his office can conduct their own investigation, including getting an engineer to inspect the bus.

"DPS is going to be doing their investigation for a period of time. If you file early, by the time DPS concludes the investigation, it will allow us to start our investigation based on their findings," Maloney said. "... Speed is off the essence."

'It was crushing me'

Reed said she was taking the casino day-trip with her card club, a group of Bell Helicopter retirees who have known each other some 50 years and play "hand and foot" every Wednesday.



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Reed said she hadn't intended to go but signed on after one of the women feared she would have to bail out on the group because of recent surgery. Reed said she arrived at the pickup spot at the Walmart in east Fort Worth to find the member had made it after all.

"I almost turned around and came home when I saw her but I went ahead and got on the bus and went," Reed said. "Now I wish I would have come home."

The group -- eight card club members and two of their friends -- sat together toward the front of the bus. Reed, who was seated in a right-side aisle seat by herself, said she had been reading the newspaper when the crash occurred.

"There was a huge noise," she recalled. "I don't know if it was a pop, a bang. ... I don't know what it was."

Reed said she remembers being tossed in the air and thrown in the direction of the right-side window.

"I put my right hand up over my face...I remember breaking the window and thinking, I'm going to go out but then a body landed on me and stopped me," Reed said. "Then two more bodies fell on us so we were anchored pretty good."

As she waited for rescue, Reed desperately called out to her friends.

"I was hollering for my girlfriends that were sitting in front of me. I wanted them to answer but I couldn't hear them," she said, her voice breaking. "But we were all hurting. I was under so many people, it was crushing me. One of the firemen came and lifted up my head from outside and raked the glass out from under my face."

'I'm hurt, I'm hurt'

Unbeknownst to Reed at the time, her daughter, Cathy Bowers, was listening to the crash's aftermath.

About half an hour before the crash, Reed had called Bowers to tell her that she was on the bus, headed to the casino. She inadvertently redialed her daughter's number during the crash while clutching her cellphone in hand.

"Mom started saying, 'I'm hurt. I'm hurt' so I knew something had happened," Reed said. "I could hear the paramedics trying to get her. I could just hear her talking to them."

Bowers gave the phone to her husband to continue listening to while she rushed to grab some clothes for the 90-minute drive from her East Texas home to her mother. Her husband turned on the television news and confirmed there'd been a bus crash but shielded his wife from watching the footage.

"He didn't want me to look at any of it," she said.

Reed said firefighters eventually used an airbag contraption to lift two people off her so that they could free her from the wreckage.

At Los Colinas Medical Center, Reed would discover she'd broken three ribs. She remains bruised from head to toe, has stitches in her hand, and swelling to her head where she struck the glass window and metal frame.

Reed said she would not learn her friends' fate until leaving the hospital that night.

"Right before we left the hospital they told us where everybody was," she said. "We searched for my friends' names. Their names were all on there so I knew they were alive."

As of Monday, she said, four of her friends remained hospitalized.

Staff writer Alex Branch contributed to this report.

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