

More Parties Named in Best Western Probe

Written by Steve Frank
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Legal action has been taken against additional parties involved in work at the Boone Best Western Hotel, work that contributed to the three deaths there last spring. Superior Court Judge Donald Stephens issued an order barring Charles Harold Robinson, Rich Moses, Steve Thigpen and Appalachian Hospitality Management, the company that managed the hotel from ever again violating state law by “engaging in business as a plumbing, heating or fire sprinkler contractor.” Judge Stephens issued an injunction against the company’s maintenance workers who reportedly installed a used swimming pool water heater at the Best Western in Boone, swapping it out from one of the company’s other Boone hotels. Carbon monoxide from that heater is blamed for the deaths. The order comes after the State Board of Examiners of Plumbing, Heating & Fire Sprinkler Contractors sought court action, the consent order agreed to by the parties even though the Charlotte Observer article says they denied they were acting as contractors. The State Board of Examiners is also considering disciplinary action against Dale Thomas Winkler, a licensed contractor who worked on the pool heating system, according to the Observer. Court documents say employees were not licensed to do the work, and did not get a permit or an inspection. Damon Mallatere, who owned Appalachian Hospitality, was indicted in January on three charges of involuntary manslaughter and one charge of assault inflicting serious bodily injury—that for injuries suffered by Jeffrey’s mother, Jeannie Williams, who was also poisoned by the gas but survived. Mallatere’s attorney released a statement when the hotelier was arrested in January that a gas company later converted the heater from propane to natural gas and did get an inspection of that from the Town of Boone for that work. Carbon monoxide from the swimming pool heating system seeped into room 225 on the floor above and killed Daryl and Shirley Jenkins last April and 11-year-old Jeffrey Williams in June. The next court date for Mallatere is June 23.