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966 Retirement home named in lawsuit

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JUNCTION CITY — The 69-unit Junction City Assisted Living and Retirement facility has been named in a class action lawsuit alleging that its owner, **Sunwest Management Inc.**, knowingly understaffs its 50 Oregon retirement facilities and fails to provide services required in its contracts with residents.

Sunwest, based in Salem, has termed the claims of the suit "frivolous and inaccurate."

The lawsuit was filed on March 22 in Multnomah County Circuit Court. Two residents of Sunwest-operated Deer Meadow Assisted Living in Sheridan are named in the suit as plaintiffs and as representatives of a class that includes all residents of Sunwest facilities in Oregon.

The lawsuit claims the Sunwest residential centers charge for services that the management has no intention of providing. The suit also claims the company falsely represents the qualifications of its employees by counting uncertified staff in ratios of certified caregivers for residents.

The suit also claims the retirement communities purposely understaff custodial personnel, many of whom are not trained to care for elders.

See **CLASS ACTION**, page 15

Class Action from page 1

The suit also alleges that many of the claims outlined are violations of Oregon law.

Steven Stadley, Sunwest's director of risk management, disputed the claims of the suit in a prepared response provided to the News.

"We . . . deeply regret the actions of a handful of trial lawyers who file such misguided class ac-

tion lawsuits in a variety of states to advance their own practices, as opposed to doing what is truly best for residential care center residents and senior citizens in general," the response reads.

The statement says Sunwest looks forward to addressing the issues and is confident that "the facts of the situation will come to light."

California-based attorney Kathryn Stebner filed the lawsuit in Oregon and is also involved with a similar class action suit that was filed in January against 16 Sunwest homes in California.

According to its Web site, Sunwest operates over 150 retirement and assisted living homes across the U.S. The Salem office is headquarters for the entire operation.