



\$600,000 in Premises Liability Death

Estate of *Ahiahornu v. Georgia King Village*: The family of a woman who was murdered outside her Newark apartment agreed to a \$600,000 settlement Monday in an Essex County suit.

As Diana Ahiahornu, a 31-year-old nursing student, got out of her car at the Georgia King Village parking lot at about 11 p.m. on Aug. 6, 2000, she was attacked by Joel Myrtle, whose romantic overtures she had rejected. He struck her head with an unknown object and she died at a hospital several hours later. Myrtle was convicted of murder.

Ahiahornu's estate sued Georgia King Village and Alex Clark & Associates, which was under contract to provide security patrols. Georgia King Village brought third-party complaints against two insurance agencies, Leon G. Silver and Associates of Cranford and the John Palitto Agency of Hazlet, charging they disregarded instructions to add

the apartment complex as an additional insured under policies covering Alex Clark & Associates.

The suit charged that street lights in the area were not working, that the guard assigned to patrol the area was taking a cigarette break and that Georgia King Village failed to assign a substitute and ignored staff members' complaints about defective lights. The defendants countered that the attack was not random but aimed at Ahiahornu.

Plaintiffs' lawyer, **John Voynick Jr.** of **Renda & Voynick** in Cedar Grove, obtained expert testimony that Ahiahornu suffered for 20 minutes before her death, though the defendants claimed she experienced no pain.

The parties agreed to settle in a conference with Superior Court Judge **John Kennedy** a week before trial was to start. Alex Clark & Associates agreed to pay \$285,000; Georgia King Village and the Palitto agency



JOHN S. VOYNICK, JR.

\$150,000 each; and the Silver agency \$15,000.

Howard Cogan of **Gallo, Vitucci, Klar, Pinter & Cogan** in Englewood Cliffs represented Alex Clark & Associates. **Thomas Rantas** of **Morgan Melhuish Abrutyn** in Livingston represented Silver. **Charles Murray III** of **Farkas & Donohue** in Fairfield represented Palitto. **Stephen Hopkins** of **Braff, Harris & Sukoneck** in Livingston represented Georgia King Village.

— *By Charles Toutan*