

Orkin to do \$6M fix-up at Wildwood condos long ravaged by termites

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WILDWOOD - Pest-exterminating giant Orkin has pledged to repair a termite-ravaged condominium complex in Sumter County as part of a legal settlement that could cost the company an estimated \$6 million in fix-up costs.

The company did not accept responsibility for pest damage at the Sandalwood Condominium Association at Wildwood, a 104-unit residential community near the intersection of State Road 44 and County Road 468.

But Peter M. Cardillo, known as the "bug lawyer" because his [Tampa](#)-based practice specializes in termite cases, said the company failed to properly treat Sandalwood's 13 residential buildings and clubhouse, rid the complex of the wood-eating pests or live up to other promises and guarantees in its contract.

Orkin spokeswoman Martha Craft acknowledged the resolution of the lawsuit but would not comment further "until everything has been formalized."

The civil trial was set to begin next month and last three weeks.

Cardillo was prepared to prosecute charges of criminal racketeering, breach of repair, breach of duty and false advertising -- for which the condominium association could have asked jurors to impose punitive damages on the Atlanta-based exterminator.

According to the lawsuit, which was filed eight years ago in Circuit Court in Sumter County, the condominium association accused Orkin of violating Florida's Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act.

Under terms of the settlement, Orkin also agreed to pay the condominium association \$815,000.

Cardillo, who drives a car with the personalized license plate "BUG LAW," said he also won earlier settlements on behalf of the condominium association from Sandalwood's insurers that were worth more than \$2 million.

Court filings show that Orkin attempted to avoid liability for termite damage by arguing that water leaked in and around the buildings, fostering the infestations that caused concern for Sumter County building inspectors.

"Orkin's position was that they didn't do anything wrong," Cardillo said. "Our theory was that they either didn't do anything at all or they didn't do it right. Orkin couldn't find records in their file so they don't know what they did."

The company no longer has a [Leesburg](#) office, which serviced the original contract that was executed in 1984, more than a decade before the complaints began.

Though the condominium association estimates that building repairs will cost \$6 million or more, Orkin officials think the repairs can be completed much cheaper -- for perhaps as little as \$2 million, Cardillo said.

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