

Jury awards family \$6.6M in child's drowning at Camp Sunshine



By JOHN M. ROMAN
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PHILADELPHIA -- A Common Pleas Court jury Wednesday found Camp Sunshine and a city management firm, Woodrock Inc., liable for \$6.6 million in compensatory damages in the drowning death of an 8-year-old Upper Darby boy two years ago.

Anthony Slaughter, the son of Tanita and Gregory Slaughter, drowned in an unattended Camp Sunshine pool July 15, 2002, after his mother had dropped off Anthony and his brother, Gregory, then 12, at the camp the day before. At the time of the drowning there were 15 boys ages 8--11 at the pool.

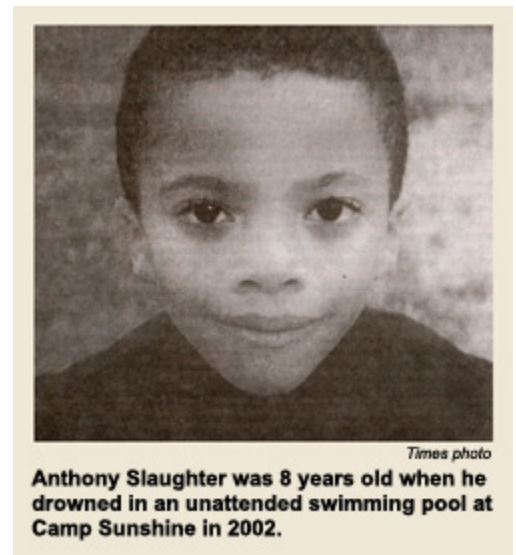
It was Anthony's first time away from home, his mother told the Daily Times in an interview in July 2002. The bespectacled boy, who loved "Harry Potter," soccer, video games and reading, had finished first grade at Stonehurst Hills School a month prior to the accident.

[Tom Kline](#) of Kline and Specter, an attorney who represented the estate of the Slaughter family, said the civil court jury found Camp Sunshine in Thornbury 90 percent responsible and Woodrock Inc. 10 percent liable in the boy's death.

Woodrock Inc. of Philadelphia had provided the services of the camp director, Jennifer Clement. The former executive director of both Woodrock and Camp Sunshine was Richard Garrett, who was cross-examined at the trial.

Testimony at the trial indicated that Clement had failed to adequately communicate a two-lifeguard policy as well as a proper rotation schedule to the lifeguards, Kline said.

The day of the drowning there had been two lifeguards, an 18-year-old and a 15-year-old, he said. The 22-year-old pool director at the time of the incident was not at the pool, but was on the front porch of one of the nearby buildings cutting ribbons which were to identify the kids as swimmers or non-swimmers, Kline said.



The 18-year-old allowed the younger lifeguard to take a break, according to Kline. The 18-year-old then vacated his post to go to the bathroom and left the pool unattended.

"There was no lifeguard supervision, in violation of Pennsylvania law, which requires a lifeguard present at any public bathing facility with adults or children," Kline said.

According to the Public Swimming and Bathing Places General Safety Regulation of the Pennsylvania Administrative Code, "one or more competent lifeguards in adequate number shall be on duty at the waterside at all times the public bathing place is open to use by bathers," he said. "As I told the jury in my closing speech, the law is made to protect all of us, including adults and here they left precious unguarded children of tender age in the pool without supervision.

"What was revealed at the trial, and what is so important for all operators of camps and swimming facilities this summer, is to make sure that we learn from the terrible mistakes and tragedy that occurred two years ago to adopt and have in place safety rules and procedures that will assure that well-trained responsible lifeguards are watching every pool every minute that there is a child in the pool," he said.

The opening day of the trial was the second anniversary of the boy's death.

"They (parents) will never get over the unnecessary tragedy which occurred at Camp Sunshine," Kline said on behalf of the parents. "On Sunday, July 14, 2002, Tanita Slaughter kissed her little boy goodbye for what she believed would be a wonderful camp experience. She buried him four days later and will live with that grief the rest of her life.

"She hopes and prays this will never happen to another parent."