

'Dr. Doom' blew up townhouse 1 year ago, but court battles over damages just heating up

AFTERSHOCKS OF BIG BLAST

BY JOE GOULD
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A YEAR AFTER Dr. Nicholas Bartha blew up his East Side mansion, the empty lot has become a curiosity to tourists and a frustration for those entangled in the legal battle with the estate.

Former Daily News intern Jennifer Panicali, who suffered significant scarring after she was showered with flying glass when the four-story building exploded, is among 10 people involved in suits against the Bartha estate.

"She'll be lucky if she receives even a fraction of what she's otherwise entitled to," said Panicali's lawyer Jeff Korsh. "Unfortunately, there's a limited amount available in the Bartha estate."

Bartha, 66, killed himself on July 30, 2006, while faced with losing the E. 62nd St. house in a bitter divorce battle. Authorities said he opened the mansion's gas lines to trigger the explosion that reduced it to rubble.

Bartha, the so-called

Dr. Doom, had sent Cordula Hahn, his wife of 29 years, a 14-page manifesto hours before the blast in which he threatened to transform her from a "gold digger" into an "ash and rubbish digger."

Now an empty lot, the site is popular with out-of-towners staying at the nearby Regency Hotel, said Miguel Santiago, 36, a building superintendent on the block.

"The funny thing about it is it's become a tourist spot. Everybody comes by to take pictures," Santiago said. "People come to the empty space and say, 'Wow, that's where it happened.'"

When doorman driver Victor Zotos, 57, looks at the lot, he still recalls the panic and chaos that gripped bystanders.

"I thought [the boom] was a truck with a flat tire, but then I saw the smoke, and the fire, and the building coming down," Zotos said. "You had people saying it's terrorists. Nobody knew what happened."

The Bartha estate, administered by the doc-

tor's adult daughter Serena, sold the lot for roughly \$8 million in December to satisfy Hahn's \$4 million judgment against Bartha for his hospital stay after the explosion, his funeral tab and some unpaid debts.

The Russian Investment Group, which bought the plot, plans to build an 8,000-square-foot townhouse with a bamboo-fringed garden, underground pool, all-glass elevator — and an asking price of \$30 million.

The Bartha estate faces at least 10 suits in Manhattan Supreme Court from people who were hurt or had property damaged by the explosion — all looking for compensation.

"I would call it a conundrum," said David Jarostlawicz, lawyer for several plaintiffs. "We're trying to take the pot of money and divide it up in some way."



Estate of Nicholas (Dr. Doom) Bartha is being sued by 10 people for injuries and damages caused when he blew up his East Side townhouse last year, killing himself. Jennifer Panicali (r) is among the plaintiffs. The blast site is now a vacant lot (l). Photos by Matthew H. ...



YESTERDAY

Al Qaeda threatens Queen Liz

CAIRO — Al Qaeda's No. 2 threatened Queen Elizabeth yesterday for knightling Salman Rushdie, "The Satanic Verses" author whose book is considered insulting to Islam. The 20-minute taped speech by Ayman al-Zawahiri said Al Qaeda was preparing a "very precise response" for the Rushdie slap. Zawahiri also warned of new at-

tacks in Britain, coming on the heels of the recent failed bombings in London. Rushdie was awarded a knighthood by Britain's Queen Elizabeth last month to honor his career as a writer. The decision angered Muslim radicals, with some groups renewing calls for the Indian novelist to be sentenced to death.

Iran's leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had issued a fatwa, or religious ruling, in 1989 to sentence the author to death. "The government has already made clear that Rushdie's honor was not intended as an insult to Islam or the Prophet Muhammad," a spokesman for Britain's Foreign Office said in response. The Associated Press

Wed day's bloody hell for Brit groom

LONDON — A Scottish bride decided her new husband was a heel, so she attacked him with a stiletto shoe. Teresa Brown, 33, told police she and her husband had "been accusing each other of different things" before she whacked him in a hotel room upstairs from their reception, prosecutor Alan Townsend said yesterday. The distraught groom, Mark Allerton, 40, staggered to the

front desk, clutching a bloody towel to his head. Townsend said. Brown spent the rest of her April wedding weekend in a cell, although authorities dropped the assault charge against her yesterday in favor of a warning, a fine and compensation for the hotel. Brown's lawyer Stuart Beveridge said yesterday, "She and her husband are still together, although this incident has not helped." The Associated Press