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Shaker fires its police billing firm

By Karen Kurdziel Staff Writer

SHAKER HEIGHTS — The city has fired the company it hired a year ago to bill insurance companies for police services provided at traffic accidents.

City administrators were not happy with the aggressive, unfriendly collection letters the company, Cost Recovery Corp. (CRC) of Dayton, sent to insurance companies and individuals.

"We thanked Cost Recovery and told them we could do without their wonderful public relations skills," Mayor

Judy Rawson said this week.

Nor did the company bring in any grand amount of money. Since last April, CRC billed \$120,839 but collected just \$22,486 for the city. The company kept 10 percent of everything it collected.

Nevertheless, Shaker will continue to bill for these services, a policy it initiated last year as part of its quest for additional revenue. But now, police department employees schooled in customer service niceties will do the collecting.

That won't assuage the Sec FIRES, page A7

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pain Aaron Mitchell of Columbus still feels after shelling out \$540.12 to the Shaker Heights Police Department for what he called a "no-injury, no-property damage" accident in December.

Mitchell, 26, was driving on Shaker Boulevard on a snowy night and had a sewer suddenly when he came upon a parked car in the right lane.

His steered his car into a snow bank on a tree lawn to avoid hitting anything, then called police to help him get out.

According to a police report, Mitchell hit a city tree, shearing it off.

To avoid spending time and money to return to Shaker to plead his case, Mitchell paid the city \$245 after pleading "no contest" to a charge of "full time and attention."

Then he received a bill for \$295.12 from the Shaker Heights Police Department for services rendered at the accident.

"That's correct," Mitchell said in an e-mail. "A total cost of \$540 for an . . . accident from which, once the car was shoveled out of the snow, I was able to drive away." He ignored the first re-

quest, then got a harsh letter (from CRC) demanding the \$295 and including a lengthy rant about how rich insurance companies are.

"Somehow they (CRC) didn't seem to notice I am not an insurance company. I'm a recent college graduate trying to make a start in the world."

Mitchell works full-time as a computer programmer while completing his master's degree at Ohio State University.

"But what's worse," Mitchell continued, "is that, as an ordinary citizen, I feel placed

in a no-win situation. It would cost more to challenge the legality of (Shaker's) ordinance than to pay the bill."

On the other hand, Mitchell wrote, "non-payment risks the devastation of an otherwise flawless credit record."

"What options for true justice does the ordinary citizen have when faced with (such a situation)," he wondered.

But Police Chief Walter Ugrinic said "the ordinance was reviewed legally and found permissible."

"We're not making

money," Ugrinic added. "(The companies and individuals being billed) are paying for a service."

Taking over the billing adds another duty for police, Ugrinic said. "Meeting this task will be a challenge, but it's one I feel is necessary and we should do."

This way the department has control of the process, which Ugrinic said will be "customer-friendly." We expect a better collection by being nice."

No new personnel will be hired to do the job, Ugrinic said, nor will the city cut the number of police officers if companies don't pay. "We may have to make cuts at some point, but that won't depend of these collections."

Ugrinic said delinquent parties will be dealt with individually. He said city administrators would review each case and decide whether to pursue collection.

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