

Coaster victims in suspense over bills

Families of those hurt on ride seek answers from Branson USA theme park.

By Hannah Bergman
News-Leader

BRANSON — More than a week after one roller coaster train crashed into the back of another at the Branson USA theme park, sending eight people to the hospital, the injured and their parents are demanding answers.

They want to know exactly what happened, and they want to know what to do with their medical bills.

All eight of the passengers on the Windstorm coaster when the collision happened were taken to Skaggs Community Health Center. Now the bills are rolling in, but they say the park won't talk with them.

Branson USA managers also have not responded to calls and messages left by reporters for the past three days seeking the park's response to the families' complaints.

Dana Weldy of Mount Vernon, whose son, Auston, was hurt in the July 21 crash, has a \$464.60 bill from an ambulance service. She's expecting a hospital bill, too.

At first, Weldy said, "We tried not to gripe." Since he was taken from Branson USA, she said, she thought bills would be taken care of. At Skaggs, "nobody ever said a word to us about our insurance."

Efforts to contact the park were not successful until she left what she described as



File photo

The Windstorm coaster at Branson USA is open after a July 21 accident.

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(Branson USA)

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"unpleasant messages" on the park's answering machine.

She then got a call from a park employee who took her name and address and said the park's insurance company would be in touch. K&K Insurance called once and left a message, Weldy said, but she hasn't been able to reach them since.

Auston was at the park with Kathy and Joe Myers, also of Mount Vernon, and their children. Joe Myers, who was on the coaster at the time of the collision, said one ride operator asked him whether he wanted an ambulance. Another apologized for the incident, but couldn't say what had caused the crash.

"Those were the only people from the park who talked to us," he said.

When Kathy Myers had a returned call from the insurance company, the agent left a message. The agent is out of the office until Aug. 6 and could not be reached for comment.

Other riders, Brian Phillips of Rogers, Ark., and Rick and Kathy Jackson, of Ozark, Ark., whose daughters were on the coaster, have talked to the insurance company, but don't yet have papers they are supposed to fill out.

Moreover, all still have questions about what happened on the ride.

A state fire marshal's investigation found no mechanical cause for the accident on the coaster, which has since reopened. The report did not, however, rule out operator error.

The medical bills at Skaggs likely are the responsibility of the patients or their insurance, the hospital said.

"If there's a third party who might be responsible, it will probably turn into a legal matter between the patient and third party," Skaggs spokeswoman Mary Jo Fisk said.