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Darien Actor Sues Alleged Assailant & Bar Owner After Injuries at Chez Ernie's

Author : David Gurliacci

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A Darien man, who's gone through three surgeries costing more than \$100,000 after he was punched and knocked to the floor at Chez Ernie's bar, is now suing the man arrested in the incident as well as the bar and bar owner.

Matthew Porretta, 51, an actor who's appeared in films, on television and on Broadway, didn't know the alleged assailant, Christopher Aikler, 43, of Bayne Street in Norwalk. Porretta doesn't even know why the man would have hit him with the glass beer mug.

According to the lawsuit, filed last month in state Superior Court in Stamford, Porretta came near Aikler when Aikler hit him on the left side of his face with a beer mug, causing the mug to shatter.

The force of the blow "caused Matthew Porretta to be propelled backwards into a high top table, striking the back of his head and causing him to fall to the ground."

Porretta was taken to Stamford Hospital by ambulance. He received injuries to his nose, face, spine and particularly to an eye, according to legal papers filed in court. Porretta "required emergency ocular surgery to salvage his left eyeball," the lawsuit states.

He's been left with "permanent and disfiguring scarring," has lost work and "his ability to earn income in the future has been impaired."

The incident was reported to Darien police at the time, but by then, [police said](#), Aikler already had been escorted out of the bar by bar management. He drove off, and it took hours for police to identify him and speak with him. On Jan. 11, Police arrested Aikler on a warrant charging him with second-degree assault, third-degree assault and breach of peace.

Under the Connecticut Dram Act, bars can be sued when they serve alcohol to people who then commit crimes, but notice of the lawsuit has to be given to the defendants within 120 days of the incident. Porretta's complaint, filed by Attorney Michael Burrell of Bridgeport, names Chez Ernie's Cafe and its owner, Stephen Palmer of Norwalk, as defendants.

Porretta was at the bar with a Southbury man, also 51, who was also struck by Aikler and who also was taken to the hospital, according to police. Police said neither of the men knew Aikler or knew why he struck them.

Aikler's criminal court case continues in state Superior Court in Stamford. He is represented by Attorney Mark Sherman of Stamford, where he is next scheduled to appear on April 17. Aikler has been released on a \$15,000 bond. The Connecticut Judicial Website lists his three-month-old case as still "awaiting plea."

For the civil lawsuit, Aikler is represented by Attorney Keith McCabe of Hartford. Palmer and Chez Ernie's Cafe are represented by two lawyers from Boston, and the next court date is Monday, April 10.

Porretta, who grew up in Darien, has acted in movies, including Mel Brooks' "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" in 1993; in television, including "Beverly Hills 90210" in 1990, and starred as Robin Hood in a TNT television series, "The New Adventures of Robin Hood" in the late 1990s.

He's also acted on Broadway, appeared in commercials and done voice-over work. In 2012 he was one of the judges for that year's "Darien's Got Talent" competition.