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NewsRoom

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Lawsuit claims hair treatments a scam
No growth, no refunds, plaintiffs say

Lisa Donovan

When laser therapy, scalp massages and dietary supplements didn't work, two clients of Deerfield-based Natural Hair Growth Institute sought refunds.

Now the two former clients, Virgus Jacques and Margaret Farrell, have filed a class-action breach-of-contract and consumer fraud lawsuit against the company, saying they're part of a larger group that used the program, saw no success and, ultimately, didn't get thousands of dollars back despite a guarantee.

"NHGI's routine practice of informing its customers that they will be refunded the total cost of the program if there is no hair growth progress by the program end -- when NHGI has no intention of refunding the money -- and telling clients that the program is virtually always successful -- when the program many times does not work -- deceives customers," the suit states.

A woman who identified herself as general counsel for company owner Steve Bennis said "They're all just allegations; there's no foundation to it whatsoever to where I stand."

Jacques and Farrell separately visited the Oakbrook Terrace office last summer, seeking help with their thinning hair.

In those meetings, Bennis allegedly told Jacques the success rate was so great that only one refund had been issued by the company. He allegedly told Farrell no refunds had been issued, according to the suit filed Tuesday in Cook County Circuit Court.

Both were told in their separate meetings about a 100 percent money-back guarantee if the program didn't work.

But nothing worked -- not the the scalp massages, the specialty hair products or the "orbit laser light" therapy,

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described on the company's Web site as directing "biostimulative energy to the body's cells, where it is converted into chemical energy to promote healthy rejuvenation of hair."

Now Jacques is seeking the \$11,124 he spent, and Farrell wants her \$8,800 back.

While the company's Web site touts success stories along with the money-back guarantee, the suit claims the company "doesn't provide such refunds and never intends to provide the refund at the time of contract formation with its clients."

The Better Business Bureau revoked NHGI's accreditation in September 2008 and has given the company an F, its lowest grade. The Illinois Department of Professional Regulation fined Bennis \$10,000 in November 2008 and ordered him to stop using laser treatment for hair loss without a license, said spokeswoman Susan Hofer.

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