

Woman awarded \$1.8M after three-story plunge

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11910 NE 16th Ave., did not return a telephone call seeking comment. The company, Cornerstone Residential Management, could appeal the jury's decision.

The roots of Vente's ordeal began in Miami Beach, where Davis was suspected of the January 2009 strangulation of Bradley Paul, 18, whose body was found slumped next to a vacant South Beach apartment building.

When Miami Beach detectives went to Davis' Meridian Avenue apartment to question him, the 32-year-old crashed through a second-story window and ran away. He got into a nearby residence and held a family at knifepoint overnight — and fondled a teenage boy — before escaping the police dragnet.

Detectives, tracking a stolen cellphone, caught up with Davis hours later at the Leeward Motel, 11790 Biscayne Blvd. Again, he escaped into the neighborhood.

At the time, Vente lived at the Bay Winds apartments, run by Cornerstone, one of the nation's largest affordable-housing companies.

Home alone, Vente was watching television when she heard a knock. She opened the door, believing it was the air conditioner repairman coming to fix a broken unit.

Instead, Davis barged in. As she bit him and screamed, Davis choked her with a piece of clothing until she passed out. When she awoke, Davis had changed into clothes stolen from her



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SUCCESSFUL LAWSUIT: Francisca Vente, right, with lawyer Joe Lipsky. Vente was seriously injured when she escaped an attacker who burst into her apartment.

adult son's bedroom.

Vente quickly glanced at a photo on the wall of her son, Alexander Valentine, a Marine stationed in Hawaii. Fearing she would never see him again, Vente said a quick prayer and burst through the window screen, landing on a patch of grass three floors below.

Her sudden jump alerted police to Davis' presence. Moments later, officers shot him to death in the courtyard of the complex after, they said, he appeared to reach for a weapon in his waistband.

Vente's attorney, Joseph Lipsky, sued Cornerstone for negligence for the lack of security that allowed Davis

to storm the apartment, although it was unclear exactly how he got into the complex. There was no video surveillance at the entrances to the 10-building, 230-unit complex.

During the six-day trial, jurors learned that Cornerstone — in applying for affordable-housing tax credits from the state — had agreed to provide a gated community with card-access entry.

But apartment managers left a pedestrian gate unlocked during the day when Davis got in, and security guards worked only at night. "There was nobody whose job it was to monitor safety during the day," Lipsky said.

Also, the gates were easily scaled. And residents were not notified of crimes on the property, as the company had spelled out in its internal policies. "The manager testified that she didn't know she had to do that because she had never read the company's manual," Lipsky said.

At trial, which concluded June 13, Cornerstone cast blame on Vente for opening the front door to her apartment, allowing Davis to enter.

Jurors disagreed for the most part, finding Cornerstone and its subsidiary, Bay Winds, 80 percent liable.

Jurors deliberated just 90 minutes.