

'Depressed' senior sues Milton Academy after being expelled

By ANDREA ESTES

A former Milton Academy student, thrown out after she overslept and missed classes in her senior year, has sued the elite private school, alleging officials had no right to expel her because she was depressed and run down.

"She had a medically diagnosed condition," said Marc Redlich, a lawyer who claims the school violated the Americans with Disabilities Act when it tossed Dana Corddry one month shy of graduation.

"She was expelled on May 25. She turned 18 on May 28. This was her 18th birthday present," said Redlich.

A superior court judge last year allowed Corddry of Houston, a boarder at the school, to finish classes — but she received no grades, no diploma and was deprived of the right to attend her senior prom.

"It was a pretty serious blow to a young woman," said Redlich. "She was a good student in good standing and missed a few classes — four or five — because she woke up late.

"She had an iron deficiency that made her run down. One thing led to another. Things piled up and it had a snowball effect," said Redlich, whose suit was filed in U.S. District Court last week.

In a written statement yesterday, Milton Academy spokeswoman Cathleen Everett said officials did nothing wrong.

"The Milton Academy cares about all its students, including Dana Corddry," wrote Everett. "The Academy used both compassion and experienced professional judgment in responding to Ms. Corrdry. The Academy consistently communicated with Ms. Corrdry's parents with regard to her situation."

The suit charged school officials

showed "shocking disregard" for her health and well-being when they tossed her out, notified her classmates and then refused her a ticket to her senior prom.

"Dana was distressed, humiliated, and embarrassed by these events," wrote Redlich, who among other things claims the school should have accommodated Corddry's disability by allowing her more absences than other students.

When she was thrown out, Corddry had already been accepted to the University of Texas, where she was allowed to enter as a freshman this year after taking a high school equivalency test.

Nevertheless, her parents — who paid \$25,000 a year for the privilege of sending their daughter to the Academy — won't let the case drop. They want a judge to order the school to graduate her and give her a diploma. They also want the expulsion expunged from her record.

In addition, according to the 23-page suit, they want damages and lawyer's fees.

The school's lawyer, Miriam McKendall, who is new to the case, declined comment.

But in a statement yesterday, the school spokeswoman wrote, "The original complaint in this case was filed in May 1999. The judge upheld the school's decision to expel the student. As a precautionary measure, he instructed the school that Ms. Corddry should be allowed to attend the remaining two weeks of classes so that should a future court have a different finding, Ms. Corddry would not have been denied the opportunity to complete her classes.

"Many of the allegations in this (amended) complaint are new and have appeared for the first time this March 2000. While the school will not respond to specific allegations, it maintains that it acted properly at all times," Everett said.