SCI-TECH

"Because the sweeter the cake, the more bitter the jelly can be."
LADY GAGA SINGER

Ex-executive sues Yale New Haven Hospital for nearly $1 million

BY HARI VISWANATHAN
STAFF REPORTER

A former chief operating officer of Yale New Haven Hospital sued the hospital last week, alleging that the hospital owes him $994,000 for breaching a contract to pay a series of post-termination payments after his resignation.

According to the complaint filed by former COO Michael D. Holmes on Nov. 5, the hospital failed to issue the first payment of $248,000 — which the complaint says was due on Sep. 3, 2025 — and has refused to make any future payments, claiming that Holmes "failed to provide sufficient notice of his intent to resign."

"We are aware of the lawsuit that has been filed. Yale New Haven Health denies the allegations and intends to vigorously defend against them," Yale New Haven Health System spokesperson Carmen Chau wrote in a statement to the News.

The complaint claims that Yale New Haven Hospital agreed to provide a series of post-termination payments, known as covenant payments, if Holmes abided by the terms of a non-compete agreement. According to Holmes' complaint, the hospital has not claimed that Holmes violated the non-compete agreement.

Holmes signed the non-compete in 2013, when he joined the hospital as its senior vice president of operations. The agreement calls for three payments over 18 months after his termination date to "incentivize not joining a competitor."

Holmes' filing claims he began searching for new employment in 2024 due to "YNHH's increasing mismanagement of its healthcare system and due to a number of resignations of senior leaders caused by that mismanagement."

Holmes did not respond to a request for comment.

He was offered a position as senior vice president and Gainesville regional president at the University of Florida Health System on Jan. 30, 2025, and accepted the position on Jan. 31, the lawsuit says.

In a Jan. 31 letter included as an exhibit in Holmes' complaint, YNHH Chief Human Resources Officer Melissa Turner told Holmes that he had failed to give three months' notice of his resignation, as required under his employment agreement and was therefore ineligible for any payments.

In his lawsuit, Holmes argues that the hospital is pointing to an agreement completely separate from the non-compete agreement.

"To justify its flagrant breach of its contractual obligations, defendant points to an entirely separate employment agreement that has no relevance whatsoever to defendant's obligation to render payments under the non-compete agreement," Holmes' complaint reads. "The Non-Compete Agreement does not contain any provisions that would have required Plaintiff to provide advance notice of his intent to resign."



ERIC WANG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
After Chief Operating Officer Michael D. Holmes left the hospital, YNHH has refused to make payments required under a non-compete agreement, according to a lawsuit he filed last week.

The lawsuit adds that Holmes remains in compliance with the non-compete, which bars him from working within 120 miles of New Haven. Holmes argues that his new position in Gainesville, Florida — approximately 1,000 miles away — does not violate that requirement.

Holmes is seeking $994,000 in compensatory damages for the actual and anticipated breaches of the non-compete agreement, in addition to legal fees and other relief the court may deem appropriate.

Becker's Hospital Review ranked Yale New Haven Hospital the United States' second largest hospital by bed count in 2021.

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Yale initiative striving to regreen New Haven, with 13,000 trees so far

BY MICHELLE SO
STAFF REPORTER

At 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning, staff at the Urban Resources Initiative loaded three open-bed pickup trucks with shovels, tarps, axes and buckets.

The initiative began in 1989 as the idea of School of the Environment professor William Burch, who wanted students to gain practical experiences and community-building skills, and has been regreening New Haven since.

Today, the initiative has two main groups that assist with tree planting: Community Greenspace, a city partnership that allows community volunteers to organize environmental projects, and GreenSkills, a jobs program that employs high school students and adults with job barriers.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning, the initiative's director, told the News that then-Mayor John DeStefano Jr. and the city's parks officials set an ambitious goal for tree-planting in 2010.

"They said, but what if we planted 1000 trees? So we went from 50 to 1000," Murphy-Dunning said.

That number kept rising, and in 2022, the initiative celebrated its 10,000th tree. Recent counts put the total at just over 13,000 trees, with 475 planted this season.

The Yale crew this particular morning consisted of three School of the Environment students, one Divinity School student, one School of Architecture student and one undergraduate.

Through the initiative, Yale students work with locals, including refugees through Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services and formerly incarcerated people through EMERGE.

Elizabeth Nowlin ENV '24, a co-manager of the GreenSkills program, took on her role last fall. Since then, it has been a "trial by fire," she said.

"We are a rain or shine crew," Nowlin said, referring to the cloudy weather. "If it's just rain, then we trudge on. The kids are very resilient and we have great supervisors who keep them motivated and spirits high with incentives like hot chocolate."

Students from the Sound School, a vocational aquaculture center, and Common Ground High School, an environmentally focused charter school, are hired through the GreenSkills program. They arrived at staggered hours throughout the morning, immediately putting their hands to work.

At Goffe Street Park, less than five minutes from Yale's campus, first to arrive are siblings Linnea Loffler, 15, and Leviathan Loffler, 17. Leviathan Loffler has planted trees with the initiative for five seasons — two and a half years — while his younger sister only started last year.

"It's really cool just to see how much you're changing New Haven and the difference it's making," Linnea Loffler told the News.

As park trees planted decades ago reach the end of their lives, the initiative replaces these city giants with smaller trees in a process called succession planting. As the elders wither with age, the younger trees grow, replacing the original trees as shade-givers in due time.

The initiative planted several trees in Goffe Street Park five years ago. As expected, several trees did not survive, so the crew returned to replenish the stock.

Joi Williams DIV '27 joined the initiative four weeks ago. She studies religion in the African diaspora, specifically how Black and Brown women are carriers of religion and stewards of the Earth.



MICHELLE SO / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Yale staff meet at the central office before each planting to go over the logistics and game plan. Joi Williams DIV '27 readies for a day of planting.

Williams enjoys working with students and feels as though they've taught her just as much as she's taught them.

"I've learned a lot about how learning is cyclical," Williams said. "There's not one teacher, but we're all teachers. They teach me so much because I'm new. I don't know how to do everything, but they're pros because they've been here for so long, and so they're teaching me a lot, and I hope that I can teach them."

As the students unloaded trees from the truck, a community member approached Nowlin, claiming the neighborhood didn't want more trees, because it had plenty of trees already. She cited leaf litter on her lawn and the fees the city charged her to remove it. Nowlin calmly explained that they would only be planting on the field.

Though trees are often viewed unequivocally as beneficial things, there can be such examples of conflicting interests in a shared space. Because the planted trees were on public land, the city did not require resident permission. Regardless, Nowlin said the initiative tries to be cognizant of residents' wishes, opting for small-leaved and evergreen plants whose shedding isn't a concern.

"When we talk about species with people, we're helping them. We're educating people to know that there's many really beautiful kinds," Murphy-Dunning said. "We ask them, 'What do you most care about? Is it flowers? Is it fall color? Are you interested in birds?'"

The initiative staff also refer to a planting guide that contains information about shade tolerance, salt tolerance and watering.

The planting day concluded just around 3 p.m., and the new saplings — oaks, maples, honeylocusts — have joined the growing glen at Goffe Street Park. In a decade, the elder trees will have decayed and the young stands will have replaced them in girth and height.

On average, a sidewalk tree lives 10 years, according to a 1978 article in the publication Arboriculture & Urban Forestry.

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Will Treadway '28, in white, has taught the high school students how to prep the soil and prune branches.

