

all these problems. They should be held financially responsible."

Angelos was not available for comment yesterday. But he released a statement confirming that he is representing Wagner's Point. Residents say he has agreed to assist them in two areas.



First, Angelos will help them seek money for relocation from chemical companies, which have -- with one exception -- rebuffed requests for such funds. Second, he might represent residents who choose to bring individual lawsuits against the plants. With virtually every Wagner's Point family touched by disease, the neighborhood has no shortage of potential plaintiffs.

Still, the odds for such cases would be long. What little scientific data exists on the area offers no evidence of any connection between industrial pollution and residents' illnesses. If he pursued cases, Angelos would have to reach into his pockets to conduct environmental tests in the area.

But the main intention in hiring Angelos, residents say, is the power his name carries.

In the fall, residents wrote repeatedly to 10 companies with plants nearby, asking for \$3 million in contributions to a Good Neighbor Fund to ease the relocation. All 10 companies declined. Condea Vista changed its mind and agreed to contribute an unspecified amount after a serious chemical accident Oct. 13 at its Fairfield Road plant.

But negotiations with Condea Vista have been slow, in part because the company proposes that residents agree not to pursue lawsuits, in exchange for relocation funds. The residents' lawyers, Rena Steinzor and Brenda Bratton Blom of the University of Maryland law clinic, decided they needed a co-counsel with tort expertise and legal firepower to get the companies' attention. In the fall, State Sen. George W. Della IV, a 47th District Democrat, helped arrange a meeting with Angelos.

"Everyone should have someone of his legal stature in his corner," says Della.

Angelos' presence, residents hope, could push the other nine companies -- from the small, family-owned Delta Chemical to large multinationals like Rhodia, Citgo Petroleum and FMC Corp. -- to reverse their positions and offer relocation money.

"Mr. Angelos can put the fear of God into the companies," says Rod Sterry, a Leo Street resident.

The news of Angelos' hiring surprised several petrochemical executives.

"I don't know how to respond," said John Besson, who with his sister owns Delta Chemical. "I don't think we've contributed to the problems of the neighborhood."

Privately, three executives for companies that have not pledged to fund relocation say they would like to help.

And Enrique Bertran, who heads the trade group Chemical Industry Council of Maryland, signaled that the industry was leaving the door open to contributing.

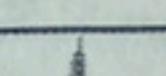
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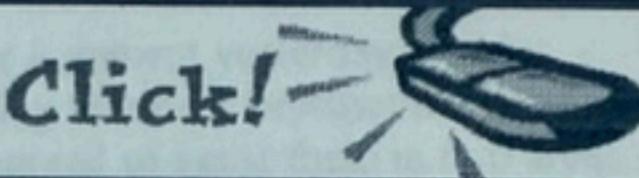
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Angelos takes up Wagner's Point cause

Residents want influence as they consider lawsuits

By **Joe Mathews**

Sun Staff

Frustrated by the reluctance of nearby petrochemical plants to fund the relocation of their south city neighborhood, residents of tiny Wagner's Point have retained one of the state's best-known tort lawyers: Orioles owner Peter Angelos.

The agreement with Angelos, who will work pro bono, appears to herald a more confrontational period in the year-long drama over the neighborhood's future. Residents have long emphasized compromise -- and eschewed talk of legal action -- as they sought a buyout package financed by industry and the city, state and federal governments.

Now, with all three levels of government committed to a buyout, some of the 270 residents are willing to consider suing the chemical plants that they blame for foul air and cancer-related deaths in the Point.

"The time has really come for this," said Richard Rotosky, whose sister died from cancer in 1996. "The chemical companies caused



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