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Logan Square residents sue Tribune, partner over coupon circulars

By Robert Channick

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Fed up with the unwanted weekly delivery of RedPlum/ShopLocal coupon packages, some two dozen Logan Square residents have sued its distributors -- the Chicago Tribune and Valassis Communications -- to stop receiving the savings offers.

The lawsuit, filed May 9 in the Circuit Court of Cook County, claims that despite repeated efforts to opt out of delivery, the free coupon packages have kept coming, piling up on doorsteps.

Beyond asking that deliveries of RedPlum/ShopLocal cease, the nuisance lawsuit seeks \$50,000 in punitive damages for each plaintiff.

"Our neighborhood gets flooded with these damn papers every week," said Michael Jaskula, a Logan Square attorney representing the residents. "It's ridiculous it had to come to this, but we need to get their attention to stop the distribution of this thing to people who don't want it."

Distributed midweek to some 3 million Chicago-area homes via mail and carrier, RedPlum/ShopLocal is a partnership between the Chicago Tribune and Michigan-based Valassis. The mailers are produced by Tribune Direct Marketing, part of the Chicago Tribune Media Group, which is responsible for their distribution.

The Tribune said in a statement that residents can opt out of receiving RedPlum.

"While we do not typically comment on lawsuits filed, we are aware of the pending litigation regarding the delivery of weekly ShopLocal packages to select Chicago properties," Maggie Wartik, a Chicago Tribune spokeswoman, said in a statement Monday. "We understand the frustration felt by some who wish to opt out, and we are revisiting that process in order to improve the customer experience. If a resident wishes to stop delivery, please call 1-800-TRIBUNE or email triblocalvalues@tribune.com."

Valassis declined to comment.

Amy Little, 55, of Oak Park, whose 10 Chicago apartment buildings receive multiple copies each week of RedPlum/ShopLocal, enlisted Jaskula's help last summer after she was unable to stop the deliveries by calling the Chicago Tribune's customer service center.

In August, Jaskula sent a letter to the Chicago Tribune on behalf of Little, her tenants and other named residents, asking that they cease delivery of all unsubscribed Tribune publications.

A free weekend edition of Hoy, Tribune's Spanish language newspaper, stopped within weeks. But RedPlum/ShopLocal kept coming. A second desist letter in January seemed to take, at least initially, but the coupon packages returned a few weeks later, piling up throughout the winter.

The lawsuit alleges that most weeks, deliveries of RedPlum/ShopLocal mailers exceed the number of units at the properties. The unwanted mailers often accumulate, "creating the impression that the property is abandoned or the owners are out of town." The home of one of the plaintiffs was burglarized while he was out of town, "in part because of the number of RedPlum/ShopLocal deliveries that had piled up on his doorstep," the lawsuit claimed.

The three-count lawsuit alleges the Chicago Tribune and Valassis are liable for trespassing and being a nuisance in the continued unwanted delivery of RedPlum/ShopLocal.

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