

COLUMBIA, S.C. -- The family of the late former Richland County Republican Party Chairman Martha Edens will receive \$950,000 in a settlement from a home health care company for a lawsuit arising from Eden's death.

The case involved alleged failings in round-the-clock home health care Edens' family had set up at her Forest Acres home, documented by videos from secret surveillance cameras the family had installed, according to documents in the case and Eric Bland and Ronald Richter, the two attorneys representing the Edens family.

The settlement money was paid by Home Instead Senior Care, a national company providing home health care for the elderly. It advertises itself as providing the "highest quality senior home care" and its motto is, "You can't always be there. But we can."

Efforts to reach Grant Chambers, an attorney representing the company, were unsuccessful Tuesday.

According to settlement documents, the company admitted no fault in the death.

Edens, who died last October at the age of 88, was the younger sister of the late J. Drake Edens, a prominent businessman who in the 1960s became known as the "Father of S.C. Republican Party" for his party-building efforts on the state and national level.

But Martha Edens was an active Republican in her own right. During her life, she served in several top positions in the National Republican Party, including National Committeewoman.

"This was a woman who dined with presidents," Bland said. "She made a decision that she wanted to be cared for in her home, surrounded by her mementos" and where her family could easily visit her.

In her 80s, Edens suffered from serious ailments, including dementia and limited mobility. In April 2014, her family hired Home Instead Senior Care at \$9,500 per month for round-the-clock caregivers, who were instructed not to leave her alone because she was subject to falls, according to documents in the case.

In December 2014, a caregiver left Edens alone in a bathroom, where she fell and suffered two broken legs, her family's lawsuit alleged.

The caregiver did not seek medical attention for Edens or notify Edens' daughter after the fall, according to the lawsuit. When Edens' daughter visited two days later, she called an ambulance for her mother, and Edens was taken to a local hospital, the lawsuit said.

A surveillance camera in the hallway as well as another camera in Edens' bathroom, captured images that allowed the case to be settled without a jury trial, Bland and Richter said.

"Without the video, we would have had to speculate when and how she was injured," Richter said. "But with the video, it was obvious that she walked into the bathroom and she never walked again, that the injury took place in the bathroom."

For two days, Edens lay in bed with compound fractures, the lawsuit said. Ten months later, she died as a result of the injury, the lawsuit said.

Edens' daughter, Dinah Cook, had installed surveillance cameras around the house, not because she was suspicious, but just because she wanted to be able to check on her mother because she couldn't be there all the time, Bland said.

"The home health care people never knew they were being filmed," Bland said.

Richter said it's a good idea for families to install surveillance cameras to check on their loved ones.

"Motion-sensor cameras are cheap, they are easily accessible by remote and they will record any activity that might become important later. If you have somebody at home, it's a pretty good safeguard," said Richter, adding the cameras should be hard to detect by workers in the house.

In 1995, Edens, who served on the Richland District 2 Board of Trustees and the S.C. Election Commission, received the Order of the Palmetto by then-Gov. Carroll A. Campbell.

Of the \$950,000 settlement, the attorneys will get \$332,500 – 35 percent – in attorney's fees. "Just because you are paying someone a lot of money to watch your parents, you can't always be sure," Bland said.