

I. P. grill may be sued after burn accident

By KEITH GRANT

An Island Park restaurant may be facing a lawsuit in light of an accident in which an 8-year-old boy was burned.

On Saturday, August 21, a fire display on a hibachi tableside grill in the Shogun Japanese restaurant on Austin Boulevard ended abruptly when fire lurched towards 8-year-old Ryan Hersh of Woodmere. With Ryan's hands, hair and sweater on fire, he was knocked to the ground by his father, Danny Hersh, and another customer who smothered the flames. The boy suffered second-degree burns on both hands.

The restaurant's owner, Raymond Chen, could not be reached, and employees at Shogun would not comment. Ryan's parents, however, are livid with the restaurant.

"This was an irresponsible act," said Mr. Hersh. "There was no thought behind it. It was just a careless act."

According to Mr. Hersh, the family was visiting the restaurant for the first time and seated alongside the hibachi grill with about a dozen other patrons. Ryan was sitting directly in front of the chef as the cook began a fiery show by pouring vodka onto the flaming grill. After flames shot towards the ceiling, according to Mr. Hersh, the chef asked Ryan and other young diners if they wanted to see a bigger fire, and several shouted yes. After more vodka was squirted onto the hot grill, a fireball shot straight at Ryan.

"My wife screamed, 'Oh my God, Ryan's on fire!'" Mr. Hersh recalled. "His hair was on fire, his clothes were on fire. I knocked him to the ground, then the gentleman on the other side of Ryan jumped on him with me and put out the fire."

Ryan had been quick to shield his face and suffered burns on his wrists and some singed hair. He described the experience like "a dragon shooting fire at me."

Police and paramedics responded to the scene within two minutes and treated the burns. Ryan was then taken directly to his pediatrician for treatment to prevent an infection.

Several days later, news reports began carrying Ryan's story until it became a

full-fledged national news item.

When the Hersh family heard Shogun officials say in some of those reports that Ryan had leaned into the fire, they grew outraged. According to Mr. Hersh, the customer who helped to put out Ryan's flames heard the same comments from the restaurant on television and contacted the Hersh's attorney, Cary Scott Goldinger of Garden City. Mr. Hersh said the unidentified gentleman offered Mr. Goldinger a statement that Ryan had not leaned forward.

Mr. Hersh said his son's wounds are healing, and the family was preparing to take Ryan to a Long Beach specialist to try to minimize the boy's scars. The family is thankful that his wounds were not worse.

"If it was on his face, it would have been devastating," Mr. Hersh said. "Thank God it wasn't worse. Thank God we're not sitting in a hospital right now, but we can sit here and be mad because it could have been worse."

According to Mr. Hersh, the chef dropped to his knees and cried for 15 minutes, apologizing profusely for the accident. Ryan said he was not mad at the chef for what happened, but Mr. Hersh is not satisfied with the restaurant's apology.

Though Mr. Chen has called the family twice to apologize, Mr. Hersh said, "I don't think he gets it. I don't think they've even thought about this more than just saying it was a freak accident. A waitress spills coffee on you, it's an unmalicious accident. This was an irresponsible act. An 8-year-old shouldn't have this happen to him."

In the meantime, the Hersh's are "looking into" a potential lawsuit against the restaurant. The bigger issue for them, however, is to see to it that such incidents never happen, again.

According to Mr. Hersh, friends said they witnessed the fire show the following evening and, again, several days later. That information infuriated more than just the Hersh family.

The Nassau County Fire Marshal's office and Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg are now looking into establishing regulations to prevent such fire shows.