

Ex-crew of bankrupt ship must be paid

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Former crew members of the Mirage I may be one step closer to going home after a U.S. Bankruptcy Court cleared the way for Ocean Club Cruises to pay them \$200,000 in back pay, their lawyer said Thursday.

The ruling, reached late Thursday in U.S. Bankruptcy Court for Southern District of Florida in Miami, was part of an agreement that entitles Ocean Club to \$500,000 in interim financing until the company's only vessel, Mirage I, is sold, according to Tonya Meister of the Melbourne law firm of Morgan and Barbary. Meister represents about 60 of the 80 ex-crew members still in this country. All of her clients in this case are from foreign countries.

On Dec. 31, Ocean Club filed for Chapter 11 protection from creditors, leaving employees without a job and no way home. The Mirage I, where most of the 80 ex-crew members sleep, has been docked at Port Canaveral, because of an injunction by the creditors.

Ocean Club estimates the former crew members still in the United States are owed \$350,000.

Mirage I started cruising from Port Canaveral in mid-May 2003, and halted service when it filed for Chapter 11. It had offered two-night cruises to Nassau; two-night cruises to Grand Bahama Island; and three-night cruises to Key West and Grand Bahama Island.

The bank that holds the mortgage on the ship will provide the interim financing until the sale of the property is completed. Mirage I is expected to be sold to a new owner in about 60 days, Meister said.

"This is a great success in that the crew members will get paid" money they are owed, Meister said.

Meister said it was ruled an undetermined amount of the \$500,000 would go toward insurance and other necessities for the ship's maintenance.

Mirage I is covered by two insurance policies, both of which are set to expire this month unless payments are made. It has not been determined if those payments will be made in installments or in bulk payment.

According to documents filed in the Bankruptcy Court, Ocean Club Cruises — also known as Magic Cruise Line Services Co., a Marshall Islands-based operation — owes \$4.83 million to creditors, but has assets of only \$245,943.

The ship has a maximum passenger capacity of 850. ■
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