

Local News

## County settles sexual harassment suit

**2 Sheriff's Department secretaries to receive \$325,000; deputy disciplined**

1/22/03

By DAWN HOBBS

NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Santa Barbara County agreed Tuesday to pay two Sheriff's Department secretaries \$325,000 to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit against a deputy -- even as an unrelated investigation gets under way into similar complaints about the head of the deputies' union.

Angela Sanders and Julie Glass alleged Deputy Clayton Turner sexually assaulted, battered and harassed them while on duty in the Lompoc substation and that the department retaliated against them after they filed the complaint, according to a lawsuit filed in Santa Barbara Superior Court in June 2002.

Deputy Turner could not be reached for comment.

Sheriff Jim Anderson and Chief Assistant County Counsel Steve Underwood said the settlement is not an admission of guilt, but rather a business decision. It would cost significantly less to settle than to go to trial, they said.

However, Sheriff Anderson said some of the allegations against Deputy Turner were substantiated.

"There is no question his behavior was inappropriate," Sheriff Anderson said. He confirmed that Deputy Turner was disciplined, but would not release the details because it is a confidential personnel matter.

"I'm trying to get across to our employees that this kind of behavior is unprofessional and it is

not to occur in our workplace," the sheriff said.

"I'm trying to set that tone by putting out this information both on e-mail and in a video to our employees. It will also be followed up with trainings and other meetings."

The News-Press recently learned another investigation was launched into allegations against Deputy Jim Burke, president of the Deputy Sheriff's Association.

Sheriff Anderson said that investigation should be complete in about a month.

"This is another issue where we have become aware of improper conduct and we initiated an investigation," he said.

The sheriff declined to release details of the allegations against Deputy Burke, except to confirm that several women have complained about his behavior.

There is some concern within the department that Sheriff Anderson might be lenient toward Deputy Burke because the union contributed \$50,000 to the sheriff's campaign last year.

"It absolutely has no bearing on the discipline decision," said Sheriff Anderson. "The discipline will be based on the seriousness of the conduct."

Deputy Burke could not be reached for comment. The union's vice president, Deputy Mike Durant, did not return News-Press phone calls.

The lawsuit against Deputy Turner alleged that "he grabbed, slapped, pulled and touched each (woman) in a sexual and uninvited manner with intent to cause harmful and offensive contact."

Both women claimed the deputy slapped their buttocks, asked them to sit in his lap and made lewd comments about their bodies.

Deputy Turner, who has been with the department for 12 years, referred to Ms. Sanders as a "brunette bombshell" and Ms. Glass as "a blonde bombshell with bodacious ta-tas," according to documents.

An internal affairs investigation began in August 2001.

Sheriff Anderson said the allegations of sexual assault and battery were not brought to the department's attention until the lawsuit was filed.

"They would have had the right to file a report and have a criminal investigation conducted,"

Sheriff Anderson said. "But they didn't."

Ms. Sanders returned to work Tuesday after being out several months on disability leave, said Janean Acevedo-Daniels, the women's attorney.

"It was a result of the injuries she suffered at the hands of Clay Turner," she said. "He put her in a control hold and refused to release her when she tried to get away."

Ms. Glass and Ms. Sanders declined comment.

"The reason they came forward is because they wanted to make sure no other women at the Sheriff's Department would be subjected to this kind of harassment," said Ms. Acevedo-Daniels.

The settlement comes in the wake of last year's \$2.7 million judgment awarded two women officers from the Santa Barbara Police Department who alleged gender discrimination.

The women deputies opted to settle rather than go to court.

"It wasn't about money for them," Ms. Acevedo-Daniels said. "It was about getting the department to deal with this in a responsible way. ... The Police Department case was originally about making basically the same changes. Because the department was not willing to settle, there was a huge monetary recovery. The department could have settled for \$300,000 a year before the trial."

Last month, the city did settle a claim by paying \$250,000 to Claudia Sharpe, a civilian employee who alleged Police Department officials retaliated against her after she testified in the gender discrimination trial.

Mr. Underwood said the county has not handled complaints any differently since the Police Department lawsuit was settled.

"But you take into account all of the information you have and for a lot of people, that was a surprising verdict and a lot of money," Mr. Underwood said.

"And then there's the possibility that there could be 12 people on a jury who would view things in a way that could create a liability for the county."