

Bank site pulls racist descriptions

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Wells Fargo & Co. overhauled an online home referral program that described low-income neighborhoods as places heavily populated by blacks who “tend to purchase ... takeout food from chicken restaurants.”

The San Francisco-based bank, one of the nation’s largest mortgage lenders, took the action last Thursday, a day after a nonprofit activist group filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the racial descriptions violated the Fair Housing Act.

The bank’s Web site also defined “middle class urban” neighborhoods as mostly black communities where residents favored wine coolers and classified “West Coast Immigrant” neighborhoods

as heavily Hispanic communities with unusually high unemployment and poverty rates.

In a statement last Thursday, Wells said management decided to remove the descriptions “until we can determine if the editorial content is compatible with our demonstrated commitment to low- and moderate-income and minority home buyers”

Wells said the search service is linked to an independently owned and operated site, Homefair.com, that is licensed to more than 2,000 other Web sites.

“We have no control over the data or content of this search tool, but ... we believe it’s our responsibility to take this action to address the concerns expressed,” the bank

said.

In a statement last Wednesday, Wells defended the Community Calculator as a helpful tool.

Joseph Morford, a bank analyst for Dain Rauscher Wessels in San Francisco, wasn’t surprised to discover that the racial information had been taken off the site.

“I was shocked when I heard it was there,” he said. “It’s not something you would expect to see from a bank in San Francisco, especially in this day and age of political correctness.”

Wells provided its Community Calculator with support from Homefair.com and CACI Marketing Systems.

Michael Daniel, a Dallas attorney, applauded the removal of the racial descrip-

tions. His civil complaint sought a court order to force Wells to withdraw the information.

“You’re always glad when those kinds of gratuitous insults leave public discourse,” Daniel said.

“That stuff legitimizes racial stereotypes.”

Daniel wasn’t completely satisfied with the changes on Wells’ site.

He said the Community Calculator was still promoting racial segregation.

The calculator’s search engine does this, Daniel alleges, by listing only minority-dominated neighborhoods as prospective places to live when users indicate that they are moving from another ZIP code heavily populated with minorities.

Man convicted of bombing black Florida campus

PENSACOLA, Fla. (AP) — A federal jury convicted a white man of hate crimes and other charges Friday for setting off two pipe bombs that terrorized predominantly black Florida A&M University.

Lawrence Lombardi, 42, was convicted of two counts each of possessing and using bombs, causing destruction with bombs and using bombs to cause harm and intimidation because of race or color.

Lombardi, an unemployed embalmer who once also worked stocking vending machines at the Tallahassee school, sat impassively as the verdicts were read. He faces up to life in prison when he is sentenced Sept. 15 in Tallahassee.

Defense lawyer Tim Jansen said Lombardi would appeal after the sentencing. The trial was moved to Pensacola because of extensive publicity in the capital

city.

“We’re extremely disappointed with the verdict,” Jansen said. “These were very difficult issues for everyone involved. We believe the evidence was insufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt.”

The Aug. 31 and Sept. 22 bombings caused only minor damage to restrooms in administration and classroom buildings and no one was hurt.

But the second blast was followed by phone calls threatening more, and left the campus gripped in fear. A university official testified 400 students withdrew after the bombings.

The prosecution introduced recordings of the anonymous calls made to a television station on the day of the second bombing.

In her closing argument Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen Rhew urged the jury to “listen to the tapes.”

Lombardi admitted making one of the Sept. 22 phone calls, both filled with the repeated use of a racial slur and expletives, but his lawyer contended he was just “jumping on the bandwagon” after the explosion.

Defense attorney Tim Jansen said all the prosecu-

tion proved was that his client was a talker, not a doer, who had never acted violent toward a black person although he did make racist comments to white friends.

The tapes were important because no one saw Lombardi making or planting the bombs.

Jurors convict white man in shooting of black motorist

CHESTERTOWN, Md. (AP) — Jurors found a man guilty of first-degree murder Wednesday in the shooting death of a 73-year-old woman who was riding home with two other black women from a Christmas shopping trip.

David Starkey claimed the shotgun fired twice accidentally, while prosecutors, who had dropped hate crimes charges against the two white brothers, claimed the killing of Germaine Clarkston was intentional.

“The defendant had to think about what he was doing when he broke open that weapon, loaded it, took off the safety and pulled the trigger,” prosecutor Christopher Eastridge said in closing arguments Wednesday.

After their arrest Dec. 9, the brothers told police they had been deer hunting and drinking the afternoon of Dec. 4. They were on their way to register a deer they had killed when they came across the three women, who were returning home after shopping in Delaware.

The two told police they were angered by Wilson’s slow and erratic driving, and authorities said they followed the women for more than 20 miles.

The defense maintained Starkey only meant to scare the women, and the shotgun went off accidentally when he pointed it out the window of the truck his brother, Daniel, was driving.

Daniel Starkey was convicted of second-degree murder and attempted murder two weeks ago.

The brothers will be sentenced Aug. 11. David Starkey could be sentenced to life in prison without parole.

The jury also found Starkey guilty of two counts of first-degree attempted murder for shooting the driver, Michelle Wilson, and the other passenger, Meriam Spriggs.

The two counts carry a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Clarkston relatives shouted with joy as they left the courtroom.



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Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

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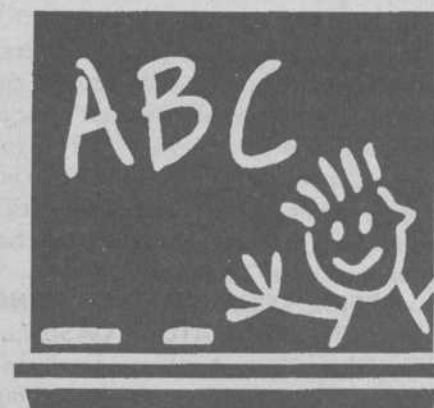
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