

Bar owners settle bias claim with lawmaker

PERRY, Fla. (AP)—The owners of a bar have agreed to give up their liquor license and pay a \$15,000 fine to settle charges they discriminated against a black Maryland lawmaker by sending him to a back room to be served.

David and Diane Holton, owners of the Perry Package Store and Lounge, also agreed

to write a letter of apology to the town's citizens.

Talmadge Branch, chairman of the black caucus in the Maryland House of Delegates, stopped at the bar Feb. 3.

He said he asked for a draft beer and was told by bartender Patricia Hughes that she could only serve him in the package store side of

the bar.

Branch told investigators he overheard another voice say that "coloreds are served back there."

Last Wednesday's agreement, announced in Tallahassee by Gov. Jeb Bush and Attorney General Bob Butterworth, settles state charges of civil rights violations and unfair trade prac-

tices against the Holtons and Hughes.

"It is unconscionable that in 2001 in any part of our state we would have a business catering to one group of people in the front of the facility and another in the back," Bush said.

"I hope (the license forfeiture and fine) sends a signal that the state is serious

about enforcing civil rights laws."

Branch, reached at his Baltimore office Wednesday, said he appreciated that Bush and Butterworth acted quickly and decisively.

"This action sends a clear message not only to Florida but across the country that this kind of discrimination will not be tolerated," Branch

said.

Greg Parker, the Holton's attorney, said the couple didn't have the money to fight the charges against them and believed it was best to settle with the state and sell the bar. He said they are negotiating with a prospective buyer.

"They felt like they were being unfairly persecuted," Parker said.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Office specialist Alicia South opposes staff changes wrought by Edison takeover.

Edison

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position was filled without any preliminary interviews whatsoever, and says she was told she would be interviewed by a "team" made of Edison representatives and Williams. "I had an interview," South explained, "but not with an Edison person. I was interviewed by the principal," she said, and described an odd encounter.

"She asked me two questions," South recalled, "'What is Edison?' and 'What can you bring to Edison?'" She told me she would 'get back to me.'" Williams did.

"She said, 'I just wanted to tell you, you didn't get the position.' She told me, 'it was given to someone else,' said South. "I was shocked that it was done that way, and felt very misled."

Said Williams: "Every teacher who expressed interest was interviewed by myself and an Edison representative. I never interviewed alone because I wanted to avoid anyone saying I was biased." But South's complaint questions the procedure used for staff, not faculty, and Williams said in the case of support staff, "I conducted those interviews alone."

When contacted yesterday, Orci con-

firmed South's account of how interviews were to be conducted.

"There should have been such an interview, the principal and a representative from Edison," he said, but declined comment on the specific case of Alicia South. "I'd need to know what the facts are," said Orci. "I don't want to speculate."

South went on to explain why, she says, "A lot of teachers were really shocked that I wasn't staying."

"I grew up in the area and I know the parents of a lot of the kids who go there now," she said. "To me it was more than a job. Those kids would confide in me, a lot of parents would call me with their concerns. I'm not there just for the assistant principal and other staff, I'm there for the children."

South believes favorites were selected, and that others were interviewed merely for the sake of formality. She said her "interview" lasted "not even five minutes, I'm lucky if it was three minutes," and thinks there are about seven others in her situation. One of them, said South "told me her interview was conducted in a door-

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Firefighters

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Russell-Williams trained rigorously for years to build the stamina she knew she needed to pass the CPAT, the test used to determine who will and who will not be hired by the fire department. Out of 2000 who test only the top 10 percent are hired by the fire department.

The test given by the CCFD had a flaw. The pike pole used in the test did not have a neoprene grip as dictated by the International Firefighter Training Administration Manual. She pointed this out to the fire department. Fire Chief Earl Greene ordered a change and a retest for every female that had failed the test. It took months to retest all of them.

Russell-Williams was tested and hired in January. She began her training as a probationary firefighter Jan. 22, 01.

Immediately trouble began in the classroom.

She was allegedly called a Black bitch.

She was accused of getting preferential treatment because she was Yvonne Atkinson-Gates' niece. She is not related to the Clark County Commissioner.

She was told that the firefighters "on floor" were talking about her.

To Russell-Williams, some of it was small petty stuff that came out of nowhere but she wanted it

stopped. It hurt and it bothered her. She went to her supervisors three different times about it.

"They asked me what I wanted them to do. They told me it wasn't fair but it is what I would have to put up with in the department. That it was the nature of the job," she said.

Then she heard that she was "the girl who changed the CPAT," and it all began to make absurd sense to her.

Physically, she outdid many of the men in her class. She ran a mile in 7.20, did 25 push-ups, 18 dips, 7 to 10 pull ups.

Academically, she was in the top five percent of her class.

But then, the cadre, the six men who were supposed to be her teachers, joined the classmates in their abuse and it got much worse.

"Everyday I heard, 'Look at that black bitch. She doesn't deserve to be here. She's incompetent. She can't do the job.'"

The cadre of trainers was composed of Probationary Captain John Grana, Paramedic Captain Eric Poleski, Firefighters, Dava Ombadykow, Karl Kendrick, Steven Broadwell and Engineer Jonathan Wiercinski.

The class was given three minutes to change from their duty uniforms to the physical training uniforms. The men dropped their clothes in class.

Not daring to say anything about not having enough time to get to the locker to change, Russell-Williams and the other female in the class changed in the classroom twice, then Russell-Williams began changing in the locker room.

It took longer.

It made the trainer angry. Angry enough to pick up a chair and throw it across the classroom. Angry enough to swear and yell and knock her study material off her desk.

Extremely violent explosions took place every day.

In late February her shoulder was injured. She was under a doctor's care but still going to class and still participating when she was ordered to have an MRI.

She did not have the MRI. The CCFD doctor gave her the same advice her own doctor had given her. When she returned from the doctor's office her fears were confirmed that it had just been ruse to get her out when one of the cadre commented, "Did you sell your f--- soul to the doctor, Russell? How much did you pay him?"

The noose appears

One morning when she walked into class there was a noose hanging over the television set. Her gear was stored under the television. She removed her gear and sat down.

The class spent the day learning knots.

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