

Jury states Black area denied water services

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Residents of a mostly Black neighborhood in rural Ohio were awarded nearly \$11 million recently by a federal jury that found local authorities denied them public water service for decades out of racial discrimination.

Each of the 67 plaintiffs was awarded \$15,000 to \$300,000, depending on how long they had lived in the Coal Run neighborhood, about 5 miles east of Zanesville in Muskingum County in east-central Ohio.

The money covers both monetary losses and the residents' pain and suffering between 1956, when water lines were first laid in the area, and 2003, when Coal Run got public water.

The lawsuit was filed in 2003 after the Ohio Civil Rights Commission concluded the residents were victims of discrimination. The city, county and East Muskingum Water Authority all denied it and noted that many residents in the lightly populated county don't have public water.

Coal Run residents either paid to have wells dug, hauled water for cisterns or collected rain water so they could drink, cook and bathe.

"As a child, I thought it was normal because everyone done it in my neighborhood," said one of the plain-



Cynthia Hale Hairston, of Columbus, Ohio, discusses her struggle for water service at a news conference at her home.

tiffs, Cynthia Hale Hairston, 47. "But I realized as an adult it was wrong."

Colfax described the verdict as unique among civil rights cases nationally, both in the nature of the ruling and the size of the award.

The jury in U.S. District Court found that failing to provide water service to the residents violated state and federal civil rights laws. The lawsuit was not a class-action. Colfax said 25 to 30 families live in Coal Run now.

The water authority must pay 55 percent of the damages, while the county owes 25 percent and the city owes 20 percent, plaintiffs' attorney Reed Colfax said. The water authority no longer exists, and the county would be responsible for paying that share of the judgment.

Zanesville attorney

Michael Valentine said in court that he intended to appeal but declined to comment further. The county commission also plans to appeal.

Attorney Mark Landes, who represented the county and water district, called the verdict disappointing. He said jurors were not allowed to hear defendants' testimony that neighborhood residents were offered water service years ago and refused it.

Colfax said he was unaware of any evidence that was excluded from the trial.

"This was a case that was started and fired by out-of-town lawyers who saw an opportunity for a cash settlement," Landes said.

The plaintiffs' attorneys will receive a separate amount to be decided later by a judge, Colfax said.

John Relman, a civil (See Water, Page 10)

Maryland city with edgy past elects Black mayor

CAMBRIDGE, Md. (AP) — This Chesapeake Bay city of idled crab processing plants and costly vacation homes has had a not-too-distant history of racial strife. But when Cambridge elected its first Black mayor this week, residents said their worries about joblessness and the economy were foremost on their minds — not the race or gender of the winning candidate.

Decades after the demise of segregation, this sleepy city on Maryland's Eastern Shore has elected not only its first Black mayor but also its first woman to the post. For Cambridge, the choice of Victoria Jackson-Stanley signaled just how much times have changed.

"I didn't set out to make history, but here it is," said

the 54-year-old social worker, who ousted an eight-year incumbent in a nonpartisan election.

Cambridge has only 11,000 residents. But in the history books it looms large as the birthplace of Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman, who was born into slavery in the 1840s on a rural plantation outside town. After fleeing the area, Tubman devoted her life to helping others escape northward.

More than a century later, Cambridge again gained national attention when a race riot left much of the Black section of the city in ashes. The year was 1967.

Locals marvel over what time has brought.

"What's that commercial? 'You've come a long way,

baby?' Oh, that's us. That's Cambridge," said Carolyn E. Jones, 61, a retired schoolteacher who attended all-Black schools as a child. "Back then there was a lot of racial strife. And look at us today."

Jackson-Stanley also recalls growing up in a far different Cambridge, where Blacks lived in a section called Ward Two and attended segregated schools. Jackson-Stanley was among the first Black students to attend the county's previously all-White high school.

"It's a very beautiful, diverse, multicultural place now," she said of her hometown, where Blacks make up just over half the population. "It wasn't always like this."

Walking outside City Hall (See Mayor, Page 10)

AMA: Excluding Black doctors very harmful

CHICAGO (AP) — Transplant surgeon Clive Callender has hurtful memories of being the only Black doctor at medical meetings in the 1970s, met with stark silence when he pleaded for better access to transplant organs for Blacks.

So when the American Medical Association formally apologized recently for more than a century of policies that excluded Blacks from a group long considered the voice of American doctors, it was belated, but still welcome.

"My attitude is not one of bitterness, but one of gratefulness that finally they have seen the error of their ways," said Callender, now 71 and a respected leader at Howard University Hospital in Washington.

It wasn't until the 1960s that AMA delegates took a strong stance against policies dating to the 1800s that barred Blacks from some state and local medical societies.

Until then, AMA delegates had resisted pleas to speak out forcefully against discrimination or to condemn the smaller medical groups, which historically have had a big role in shaping AMA policy.

While the AMA itself

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— Clive Callender



didn't have a formal policy barring Black doctors, physicians were required to be members of the local groups to participate in the AMA, said Dr. Ronald Davis, the group's immediate past president.

It's conceivable patient care suffered "to the extent that our practices may have impeded the ability of African-American physicians to interact collegially with White physicians," Davis said in an interview.

"That would certainly be another reason why we would have profound regret for our past practices," he said.

In statement on its Website, the AMA apologized "for its past history of racial inequality toward African-American physicians, and shares its current efforts to increase the ranks of minority physicians and their participation in the AMA."

The apology is among initiatives at the nation's

largest doctors' group to reduce racial disparities in medicine and to recruit more Blacks to become doctors and to join the AMA.

AMA data suggest fewer than 2 percent of its members are Black, and that fewer than 3 percent of the nation's 1 million medical students and physicians are Black.

While that's based on a survey in which the race of more than one-third of doctors was unknown, several Black physicians said the percentages ring true.

It's not the first time the AMA has apologized for its discriminatory history. In 2005, Dr. John Nelson, then AMA's president, offered a similar apology at a meeting on improving healthcare and eliminating disparities.

That came a year after the AMA joined the Na- (See Apology, Page 10)

Jackson

(Continued from Page 3)

too tough talking about responsibility. But here at the NAACP, I'm here to report I'm not going to stop talking about it. Because ...no matter how many 10-point plans we propose, or how many government programs we launch — none of it will make any difference if we don't seize more responsibility in our own lives."

Receiving continued applause and cheers, Obama also promised to fight racism and inequality.

"That means removing the barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding that still exist in America. It means fighting to eliminate discrimination from every corner of our country. It means changing hearts and changing minds and making sure that every American is treated equally under the law."

Jackson said in the interview that he only wanted Obama to speak to African-American groups with the same balanced and pointed messages that he brings to other groups.

"You go to a Latino group and speak

about the road to citizenship, bilingual education and wages. You go to labor and you talk about the right to organize, the task of securing jobs. When you go to business leaders, you talk about tax benefits, incentives and market growth. You go to women and you talk about self-determination, Title IX and Rowe v. Wade. So there's an attempt there to make a message that has broader application to speak to the particulars of those group situations," he said.

"We have chronic levels of unemployment... There are 2.3 million Americans in prison. A million are Black. There are 900,000 young Black men in jail. We're number one in infant mortality, number one in life expectancy, number one in unemployment, number one in the home foreclosure crisis," Jackson said.

"So, we have a malfunction of structural inequality that must be addressed if America is to grow. And so my only appeal was that the message must appeal to the nature and size of our problem. That's the point."