

COURT WATCH: Federal lawsuit filed against resort

03/04/2009, 8:59 pm

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Dan Churney, danc@mywebtimes.com, 815-431-4050

In federal district court in Chicago a few days ago, five former employees of Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Lodge in Utica filed a lawsuit against the resort and its owners.

The former employees are Leno Campbell, Suzanne Czarnecki, Michael DeLap, Mark Low and Lisa Meyers. The lodge's owners are Joseph Hook, Keith Wolick and Susan Wolick.

Campbell, who is black, was the lodge's director of housekeeping, employed from July 2005 until November 2007. Campbell is claiming Hook and the Wolicks discriminated against him because of his race. In particular, that Keith Wolick often made remarks critical of blacks to other employees and to Campbell himself.

Czarnecki and Meyers are claiming they were discriminated against because they were women. They also claim Hook made sexual remarks and committed assault and battery against them, in that he made physical contact of a sexual nature without their consent.

Czarnecki was the resort's revenue manager, employed from April to August 2007. Meyers was a reservationist, employed from January 2006 to September 2007. DeLap was reservation manager, employed from November 2005 to April 2007, and Low was food and beverage director, employed from February to November 2007.

All five plaintiffs are saying they suffered emotional distress and the owners retaliated against them after they complained, with all losing their jobs.

The lawsuit also said the owners knowingly employed a registered sex offender at the resort, despite the owners presenting the resort as family oriented. Further, the owners fostered an environment in which sexual harassment of female employees by the male owners was common.

The plaintiffs are represented by Erika Pedersen, of the Chicago firm of Pedersen and Weinstein.

The resort opened June 30, 2005, and has about 200 employees. Hook said last week the last four months of 2008 were economically "disastrous" for the resort. On Wednesday, Hook declined to talk about the suit, referring The Times to his attorney Mike Moody of Chicago. However apart from the suit, Hook did say business was a tad better in January than expected, but a tad worse than expected in February.

Moody declined to speak on the record, but did provide a prepared statement.

"After an exhaustive investigation by the (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) in which Grand Bear cooperated and steadfastly defended against these false charges, the EEOC terminated its investigation and filed no charges against Grand Bear. Grand Bear has every confidence that it will be vindicated in a court of law and denies that it discriminated against anyone in any way."

COURT WATCH: Attorney responds in resort lawsuit

03/06/2009, 7:36 pm

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Dan Churney, danc@mywebtimes.com, 815-431-4050

The attorney for the plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit lodged against Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Lodge in Utica has disputed statements made by the lodge's attorney.

Five former lodge employees filed the suit, claiming sexual and racial harassment. Chicago attorney Michael Moody, who represents the lodge, said the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigated the claims before the suit was filed and ended the investigation without filing charges against the lodge.

Chicago attorney Erika Pedersen, who is representing the former employees, termed this "misleading."

Pedersen said the EEOC ended its investigation without a finding either way, because the plaintiffs asked them to end it and give the plaintiffs "notices of right to sue" so they could move forward with their claims in court. In such circumstances, Pedersen said, the EEOC had to honor the plaintiffs' request. Before claims can go to federal court, they must be filed with the EEOC. Pedersen said it can take years for the EEOC to complete an investigation.