

Supervisor settles \$8M lawsuit

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Texas woman sued Richardson, attorney, said she was defrauded

By Peggy Matthews

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An \$8 million civil lawsuit filed against Madison County Supervisor David Richardson and Canton attorney Don McGraw and his law firm has been settled.

Details of the settlement were not filed in court, but the case has been dismissed by U.S. District Court Judge Wingate Sumner at the request of all parties. The case was set for trial Nov. 17.

The suit, filed in July 2002, accused the two men of defrauding an elderly widow, Frances Roehrig of Dallas, by misrepresenting the value of nearly 80 acres of land she owned in Madison County.

Richardson did not return phone calls seeking comment, and McGraw said the settlement was confidential.

"I'm glad to be through with it. We'll just leave it at that and move on to the next rat killing," McGraw said.

Richardson, an old family friend of Roehrig's, and James Butler of Madison paid \$2,000 an acre for the property and then resold it for \$800,000 to the Bridgewater subdivision development, according to the suit.

To expedite the sale, the suit alleges, Richardson pushed for the dismissal of Dennis Ford, Roehrig's trustee over the land, and recommended Ford be replaced by McGraw. McGraw's firm represents the Board of Supervisors, but none of the potential conflicts of interest were disclosed to Roehrig, the suit stated.

Richardson was hit hard in the political arena by the allegations, especially leading up to the Aug. 5 primary election. When asked questions at a candidates' forum, he said he could not discuss the case while it was in court. Richardson was defeated by Andy Taggart after 20 years in office.

Richardson's attorney, Sam Thomas, said at the time Richardson bought the property in 1999 there was no interest from Bridgewater and that developers did not buy it until more than two years later.

He called the plaintiff's appraisal of \$4,700 an acre inaccurate and said the defense appraisal valued the land at "less than what David paid for it."

"This is something that got blown all out of proportion ... Our position all along was that the lady approached David and wanted to sell her property. They all agreed on an amount, and it went through.

"I think the FBI is what stirred all this up ... but none of that was going on when David bought the land," Thomas said.

The federal agency, the state attorney general and the state auditor all investigated allegations of corruption of Madison County officials. No charges were filed after the suicide death of Chancery Clerk Steve Duncan, who was accused of embezzlement.

Roehrig's attorneys, Stephen Montagnet and Tom McCraney, did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Butler's attorney, Luke Dove, was out of town and could not be reached for comment.

McGraw's law firm, Montgomery, McGraw, Collins, Jones Cowan and Hembree PLLC, was represented by Jim Spencer and Clifford Ammons. Ammons said the allegations were without merit but would not discuss the settlement.

PHOTO

Richardson

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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