

HERALD

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NEWS

50
CENTS

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Ex-cop awarded \$550,000

Jury decides Paterson
discriminated against former
officer who was fired for a
medical condition.

In Our Towns, D1

Tuesday,
August 24, 2010

Our Towns

& CLASSIFIEDS

Jury awards fired cop \$550,000

Medical issue kept her from work

By **JOHN PETRICK**
STAFF WRITER

A jury awarded \$550,000 to a former Paterson police officer Monday to compensate her for lost wages and emotional distress after she was fired in 2006 because of a medical condition.

Michele Sedeyn, 31, of Woodland Park, sued the city of Paterson and the Paterson Police Department in 2008 after the city fired her for not reporting to work under her doctor's orders.

Following three weeks of trial before a jury and state Superior Court Judge Garry S. Rothstadt in Paterson, a jury found that the city of Paterson and its police department engaged in discrimination by terminating her because of her disability.

The panel awarded Sedeyn \$300,000 to compensate her for lost earnings and another \$250,000 for emotional distress. She will ask the court to reinstate her as a city

police officer, said her attorney, Charles Sciarra.

The panel did not find that the department or city discriminated against her because of her gender, as the suit also alleged. Part of the case asserted that male officers with medical conditions have been allowed to remain on leave without consequence. The defendant also asserted that a male superior referred to her using offensive language.

PATERSON

When she was discharged, Sedeyn was on blood-thinning medication to combat blood clotting that resulted from a pregnancy.

Sedeyn was prone to clotting, according to her suit, as the result of a previous knee injury that occurred on the job in 2002 when a vehicle ran a stop sign and crashed into her patrol car. Attempts to recover from torn tendons and a dislocated knee without surgery were unsuccessful and, in 2004, Sedeyn need-

Please see **PATERSON, D5**

Paterson: Jury awards fired cop \$550,000

Continued from D1

ed an operation.

As a result of that surgery, she developed two clots on her left leg and was hospitalized for 12 days, after which she was placed on the blood thinner Coumadin for six months to prevent any additional clotting.

"When plaintiff was placed on the blood thinners medication, her doctors advised that she should be extremely careful because the blood thinners prevented her blood from clotting and thus cuts or physical trauma could pose a serious health risk," states the lawsuit, filed in state Superior Court in Paterson.

In June 2004, about six months after knee surgery, she finished her

regimen of blood thinners. She returned to work and resumed her patrol duties.

In March 2005, Sedeyn became pregnant. During the second trimester, according to the suit, her doctors advised her that her preg-

nancy had aggravated her pre-existing propensity to develop blood clots due to the accident. As a result, the doctors prescribed the blood thinner Fragmin to prevent additional clots. "All three doctors advised the plaintiff that she could not report to work on this medication due to the environment of her workplace and the high risk of serious injury," according to her suit.

Sedeyn provided a doctor's note to the Paterson Police Chief's Office

What's next

■ Sedeyn will file a motion next month asking state Superior Court Judge Garry S. Rothstadt in Paterson to order her reinstated to her job as police officer, according to Newark attorney Charles J. Sciarra, who represented her at trial.

■ Sedeyn will also seek punitive damages against the city. Court rules require punitive damages to be decided in a separate phase of a jury's deliberations. The jury has been ordered to return to court Sept. 21. The matter is being delayed until then because of scheduling conflicts.

and the Internal Affairs Unit and on July 25, 2005, she went on medical leave. On Dec. 1, 2005, she had her baby via cesarean section. Her doctors advised her that she was to be put back on blood-thinning medication for six months to reduce the risk of clotting and that she should remain on leave until June.

From there, the city challenged Sedeyn's inability to report to work. Various doctors offered conflicting opinions as to how dangerous it was for her to perform even so much as light desk duty while on the medication. The police department, according to the suit, promised Sedeyn would not have any contact with inmates in the municipal holding cell at headquarters while assigned to desk duty, to insure her safety. Still, her doctors maintained it was too risky. Finally, on April 10, 2006, Sedeyn was fired.

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