

CIVIL RIGHTS SUIT

Woman: City of Pine Lake guilty of racism

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What started as an argument over who was next in line at a automatic teller machine has turned into a lawsuit charging the city and police **of Pine Lake** with **racism** and violation **of** a Clarkston woman's civil rights.

Vickie Lewis, who says she was beaten by a police officer and then arrested on false charges, is suing the small DeKalb County city, its police department, an officer and a Stone Mountain woman for more than \$350,000.

On Oct. 2, 1988, Ms. Lewis and Shannon Wread were among those waiting to withdraw money from a Georgia Federal Bank teller machine at North Hairston Road and Memorial Drive near Stone Mountain.

Beyond that, the parties involved agree on almost nothing.

Ms. Wread first tried to break in line, then made racist comments before calling the police to make "false accusations" against Ms. Lewis, according to her lawsuit.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Atlanta in June 1991, also claims that when a **Pine Lake** police officer arrived, he beat her up and falsely arrested her on battery charges.

Ms. Lewis's attorney, Bill Wehunt, claims that Lt. R.W. Elkins was out **of** his jurisdiction and should have let DeKalb police respond. Instead, "he whips up on her a little bit and books her for resisting arrest and assault," Mr. Wehunt said. "He didn't have the authority to arrest her."

Her innocence was proved, said Mr. Wehunt, when she was acquitted on all charges **of** battery and obstruction **of** justice in DeKalb State Court in March 1989.

"It's a case **of** racial prejudice," said Mr. Wehunt, whose client is black. "Her civil rights were also violated when she was falsely arrested." Ms. Wread and Lieutenant Elkins are white.

Ms. Lewis, 31, would not comment. **Pine Lake** Mayor Neil Copeland, **City** Attorney Bill Ritchie and Lieutenant Elkins also refused to speak about the case.

Frank Jenkins, the attorney representing the city, Police Department and Lieutenant Elkins, said race has nothing to do with the case.

"That's absurd," Mr. Jenkins said. "It's simply a police officer who is discharging his obligations as a peace officer in a manner that was appropriate. They're trying to make a case out **of** nothing."

Mr. Jenkins recently filed a motion to try to remove the city and the Police Department from the suit.

"It's not an entity that can be sued," he said. "It's also to get the city out **of** it, based on sovereign immunity. Any other claims that have been made will simply have to be tried in court."

Ms. Wread is being sued because "she put things into motion to cause this to happen," Mr. Wehunt said.

Her attorney, Keith Davidson, said the trouble started when Ms. Lewis attacked Ms. Wread and a police officer.

"Ms. Lewis had a verbal confrontation with my client," Mr. Davidson said. "It turned into a free-for-all when Ms. Lewis attacked my client and continued her erratic behavior after **Pine Lake** police arrived. She is not entitled to recover from my client."

Ms. Wread, 21, denies calling Ms. Lewis any names or starting a fight.

"My mom had me go get the money, and Vickie was standing to the side," Ms. Wread said. "I asked if she was waiting or standing in line and she said, waiting. I went ahead."

But when she did, Ms. Wread said, "Vickie said she was next in line and called me every name in the book. She was pretty irate." And then Ms. Wread's mother got into it.

"My mother told her her breath stank," Ms. Wread said, "and then she poked my mom in the eye." Ms. Wread said she then called the police.

See 1992-Aug \$500 awarded in lawsuit against Pine Lake officer for resolution of this case

