

Two Women File Lawsuit in Workplace Harassment Case; Suspect Accused Of Voyeur Tapes

March 23, 2000

The two female co-workers knew another employee crept around in the crawl space above the women's restroom, waiting to spy on their most private moments.

They say they begged management at the West Palm Beach financial services company to do something about him but were shrugged off -- even after a supervisor had asked the suspected peeper not to bring his video camera to work.

And then authorities seized a videotape full of voyeuristic images, including footage of women apparently taken from under an office desk. The alleged victims fear those shots now are floating somewhere on the Internet.

Those are just some of the allegations made in a workplace harassment lawsuit recently filed against Ocwen Financial Corp., a company that specializes in rehabilitating bad loans, and former employee Ronald Minnis.

Ocwen employees Patti Kidder and Katherine Dean claim that even after Minnis stopped working there following his April arrest in an unrelated incident, they endured a barrage of sexually charged comments from other co-workers.

"This case is about Ocwen management's failure to properly investigate my clients' complaints thus allowing Mr. Minnis' activities to go unchecked at work," said attorney William Julien, who represents the women. "My clients have since had to deal with a continuing hostile environment."

Julien said the women are sure that Minnis would spy on them when they were in the bathroom but declined to say how they knew.

Ocwen's attorney, Daniel Rosenbaum, said there was no way the company would tolerate the behavior outlined in the lawsuit.

"What allegedly happened is yet to be determined," Rosenbaum said. "Under no circumstances would a company of the high caliber of Ocwen allow an employee to remain at Ocwen if there was any evidence whatsoever to substantiate the conduct that has been alleged."

Minnis, who worked at Ocwen for two months in 1999, denied all the allegations Wednesday night.

"I definitely don't know what they are talking about," he said. "I haven't heard anything about it. It's all a bunch of lies."

He said he quit because he was fed up with management.

While Minnis, 27, faces the civil lawsuit asking for an unspecified amount in damages, he is scheduled to go to trial on May 5 on two misdemeanor counts of voyeurism, as well as felony charges of attempted burglary, resisting arrest and tampering with physical evidence. According to court documents, he is accused of secretly filming two women inside their apartments and attempting to open one of the women's bedroom windows.

Minnis was pushing on the window on April 5, when the woman pulled back the blinds and scared him off, according to Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office reports. In searching for the suspected burglar, deputies found a video camera nearby.

Deputies said Minnis came back on a bicycle to retrieve the camera, saying that he had been filming ducks in a nearby lake. He attempted to ride away from deputies until he was pulled off the bicycle, according to police reports.

As deputies wrestled with him, Minnis attempted to destroy the tape inside the camera, police reports state. Authorities later spliced the tape together and found it contained footage of women secretly filmed in their homes and in an office, according to sworn depositions in the criminal case.

Sheriff's Detective Gary Chapin said in a sworn statement that on the night of the arrest, Minnis said "that he sells video images to companies who buy these products -- raw footage of basically women undressing in front of windows and things like that."

Minnis denied Wednesday ever making such statements to authorities. He declined to talk about the criminal case against him.

After Minnis was arrested, Kidder and Dean learned that Minnis had mounted a video camera under a desk where they sometimes worked, said George Supran, another attorney representing the women.

The women were able to identify themselves from still shots taken from the video, Supran said.

Assistant State Attorney Terence Nolan said no criminal charges were filed related to the office footage after deputies failed to establish when the shots were taken.

According to the Feb. 15 lawsuit, employees repeatedly caught Minnis hiding under the desk where the camera was hidden but failed to do anything about it. Minnis also would stalk the women at Ocwen's offices on Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard and would gawk at them, according to the complaint filed in Palm Beach County Circuit Court.

Both Kidder and Dean followed Ocwen's complaint procedure to stop Minnis' harassment, but managers never bothered investigating, the lawsuit states.

Rosenbaum countered that Ocwen management never was made aware of Minnis' alleged behavior.

"Ocwen had no involvement in anything that happened, if anything happened at all," he said.

The women's suit contends that after Minnis was fired, co-workers made comments to them like: "Have you posed for any video cameras lately?"

When Dean and Kidder complained about the continued harassment, supervisors told them that Ocwen had high-powered attorneys who would "squish them like a bug," according to the suit.

Jon Burstein can be reached at jburstein@sun-sentinel.com or 561- 832-2895.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.