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## WOMEN GET \$1 MILLION EACH IN OFFICE SUIT

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Two women who were subjected to jokes and sexual harassment after being victims of an office video voyeur won \$1 million awards Tuesday from a Circuit Court jury.

The women claimed Ocwen Financial Corp. managers and co-workers made fun of them after a co-worker told police that he sold the under-the-desk video to pornographic Web sites. **Patti Kidder** and Katherine Dean sued the company for sexual harassment, permitting a hostile workplace and job retaliation.

Attorneys George Supran and William Julien, who represented the women, said the case shows that employers need to take their anti-harassment policies seriously.

"In today's environment, it's not enough to have a written policy," Julien said. "Management has to enforce it."

Supran said the women told superiors about the jokes and name-calling, but it continued.

"There were lots and lots of very insensitive and callous remarks made to these ladies by co-employees, as well as their manager," Supran said.

The lawsuit came after employee Ronald Minnis Jr. was arrested in 1999 after he was spotted outside a woman's apartment. Sheriff's deputies found a video camera with images of Kidder, Dean and other women and showed the tapes to Ocwen managers.

Ocwen, a mortgage services company, fired Minnis after learning of the videotapes. Criminal charges against Minnis were dropped by the state attorney's office.

The hidden video camera was mounted under a mail desk used by Kidder and Dean and other women in the office, the lawsuit says.

The women also claim that they suspect Minnis of hiding in a crawl space above the women's bathroom at Ocwen's offices on Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard. No tapes of the bathroom were found.

The women complained to their bosses about the unsecured ceiling tiles in the bathroom and spotting a man's hand moving the tiles, but Ocwen did nothing, the lawsuit says. Ocwen says it investigated the complaints.

The workplace harassment began after Minnis's firing, says the lawsuit, which names both Ocwen Financial Corp. and Ocwen Federal Bank.

Kidder, an auction coordinator for the company, was fired in June 2000 after filing a lawsuit. The company says she was fired for not being truthful on a work history entry in her job application in

1997. Dean, a real estate sales manager, left in November 2000. According to claims in the lawsuit, some office workers called Kidder "Patti porn star" and "Internet queen" because of the voyeurism incident. She also said a manager told her, "Why don't you get under my desk . . . "

Kidder said co-workers repeatedly asked her where they could find her images on the Internet. She said one manager also gave her unwanted neck and shoulder massages. Ocwen denied the women's claims and is considering an appeal of the verdict. "Obviously, we don't agree with the verdict," said Daniel Rosenbaum, Ocwen's attorney. "We're taking a look at it and will file the appropriate motions."

Kidder and Dean, both of West Palm Beach, declined comment on the verdict, which came Tuesday after a six-week trial before Judge Jonathan Gerber. "It's been a long fight," Supran said. "But these ladies have been vindicated after five years. They have finally achieved the dignity and respect that was taken from them."

The jury's award of \$1 million each to the women was for mental anguish and emotional trauma because of the harassment. Jurors also awarded Dean \$55,911 for lost earnings and medical expenses.

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**Illustration:** PHOTO (B&W)

DAMON HIGGINS/Staff Photographer

**Patti Kidder** (seated) and Katherine Dean won \$1 million each and Dean was awarded \$55,911 for lost earnings and medical expenses.

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