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Port St. Lucie dentist sued by former employee for brandishing gun

By Tyler Treadway
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FORT PIERCE — A former employee of a Port St. Lucie dentistry office filed a lawsuit Monday in St. Lucie County circuit court alleging her former employer brandished a firearm during a staff meeting.

The lawsuit filed by Sunday Jean Sack alleges assault, false imprisonment and intentional infliction of emotional distress by Dr. Conrad J. Kusel Jr. of Kusel Family Dentistry. Also named as defendants are Kusel's brother and partner, Dr. Brian M. Kusel, and the brothers' practice.

Sack claims that at a Feb. 3 staff meeting, Conrad Kusel held the gun over his head, appeared to cock it and said in a loud voice, "So everyone is going to sit down now, and I'm sure everyone is going to stay in line for the rest of the meeting."

At a news conference Monday morning outside the St. Lucie County Courthouse, attorney Stuart Address, who filed the lawsuit, said employees later learned the gun was not loaded; but Sack said she felt "pure panic" during the incident.

"I totally went into shock mode," she said. "I thought I was going to die."

A receptionist at Kusel Family Dentistry said Monday the Kusels were "not interested in speaking about" the lawsuit.

Conrad Kusel said staff members had given him a gift certificate to buy the weapon and "he wanted to show everyone the present that they got him for Christmas," according to a Port St. Lucie Police Department incident report.

Sack went on a previously arranged vacation after the incident and "did not return to work thereafter due to work-related stress and emotional anguish caused by this incident," according to the lawsuit. She received a letter dated March 1 indicating she had been terminated.

In a June 14 follow-up report the State Attorney's Office requested to determine if charges should be filed against Conrad Kusel, three employees, including Sack, said they felt threatened by the gun-waving incident; four said they did not feel threatened.

Also in the June report, Assistant State Attorney Ed Taylor noted the varying witness statement created a reasonable doubt that would lead to a not-guilty verdict.

Taylor called Conrad Kusel's action "an ill-timed attempt at humor which, for lack of a better expression, backfired."

The lawsuit states Sack continues to suffer "from severe emotional distress and has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of this incident."

The lawsuit does not specify an amount of damages being sought, but Address said he expected to seek "a figure in the mid- to high six figures, if not seven figures."

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