

## Torrance police profiling suit is defeated

**Jury says a 2006 Torrance arrest was handled appropriately.**

By Denise Nix, Staff Writer

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A woman who claimed she was wrongly arrested by Torrance police because of her race has lost her federal lawsuit against the city, a former chief and two officers.

Sara Plowden, who lived in Gardena when she filed the civil rights lawsuit in January 2006, claimed she was subjected to a "driving while black" arrest early on Nov. 23, 2003.

She claimed the officers physically accosted her and that city officials and former Police Chief James Herren allowed "an atmosphere of lawlessness, abuse and misconduct" to fester in the department.

While the trial was under way last month, U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Lew dismissed Herren from the case.

On Dec. 18, the jury found unanimously that neither Officer Eric Williams nor Officer Ryan Galassi violated Plowden's civil rights or caused her emotional distress.

"The city and the Police Department is very satisfied with the decision made by the jury, and we believe the evidence shows that these officers acted professionally," Deputy City Attorney David Caceres said Tuesday. "We're very pleased with the result."

Plowden's attorney, Thomas Beck, was in trial

Tuesday and could not be reached for comment.

According to Caceres, though, Beck argued to the jury that his client deserved about \$750,000 in damages to compensate her for the treatment.

Plowden claimed she suffered post-traumatic stress disorder after the incident and had medical experts testify about the condition, Caceres said.

Beck also argued that the city didn't properly train its officers and had a custom and practice of condoning this type of excessive force, Caceres added.

Galassi testified about the arrest on behalf of the city, and Herren and two lieutenants testified about the way in which the department handled Plowden's complaint and its investigation.

"They rebutted, and explained to jury that they have a very professional process by way of handling these complaints and that the officers acted accordingly," Caceres said. "The implication was that the officers were properly trained."

According to Plowden's lawsuit, she was on her way to pick up a relative at Los Angeles International Airport when she was pulled over.

As officers searched her vehicle, she asked them to cite her or let her go, her lawsuit says.

In response, she claimed Williams accosted her, "forcefully knocking her to the ground."

Plowden was arrested and charged with battery of a police officer and resisting arrest, as well as speeding and failing to signal.

During a trial, she was acquitted of battery and a mistrial was declared on the resisting arrest count. Prosecutors later dismissed the charge.

Plowden claimed she complained to Herren and "he directed an internal investigation be conducted, which was discharged in the customary biased and self-serving manner."

The lawsuit accused Torrance of having a custom and practice of making racial-profiling traffic stops and filing false battery and resisting arrest charges.

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