

Man wins lawsuit against employer

• He's given \$133,000 from Fuel Mart parent for malicious prosecution

BY CHARLENE NEVADA
Beacon Journal staff writer

Stanley Eagle didn't expect to make a million bucks when he went to work for a gas station almost three years ago.

On the other hand, he didn't expect to be charged with stealing from his employer after his first day working a solo shift.

Yesterday, however, Eagle, 44, got his due. And it was an amount that would have taken him years working at \$4.50 an hour in a gas station to make.

A jury in the Summit County courtroom of Judge Mary Spicer awarded him \$133,000 on the grounds that he was maliciously prosecuted by the parent company of Fuel Mart.

"I wasn't out to get in their pockets. I just want everyone to know I'm not a thief," a happy Eagle said after the verdict.

"It was clear the jury listened to the evidence. I'm glad that he got his day in court," Eagle's attorney, Pat Hart, added.

Mike Ports of Ports Petroleum in Wooster, an owner of the firm that operates the Fuel Mart where Eagle worked, declined to comment.

Eagle's problems started in October 1992, when he concluded that the body shop he was running just wasn't paying the bills.

At the time he was living in the Portage Lakes area, so he went to the Fuel Mart at Lovers Lane and applied for a job. He was hired for about \$4.50 an hour.

He spent a week in training, then was assigned the noon to 9 p.m. shift. That meant he closed up for the night.

He was in his driveway the next morning when Summit County sheriff's deputies arrived and arrested him.

Ernest Reynolds, the station manager, had arrived at work that morning and found \$1,172 was missing, Eagle was told.

Eagle was taken away in a paddy wagon and sat in jail for three

SUIT

Continued from Page C1

days until his bond was lowered enough for him to get out.

Six months later, Eagle agreed to take a lie detector test. Reynolds, the Fuel Mart manager who signed the charges against Eagle, also was to take a polygraph.

Eagle passed the test when he said he didn't take the money. Reynolds didn't show up for the test, according to Hart.

Charges against Eagle were dropped, although by then a story had appeared in the newspaper saying he had been charged.

Reynolds was subsequently charged with the theft. He went to trial and was convicted.

Eagle sued Fuel Mart.

Hart told jurors the company

was guilty of malicious prosecution of Eagle and guilty of negligent hiring practices. That charge was based on the fact that — Reynolds had a record for theft and drug trafficking, Hart said.

Hart said the company took the word of Reynolds, who it knew or should have known was a felon, and without further investigation prosecuted Eagle, who didn't have a record.

The jury found for the company on the issue of negligent hiring and for Eagle on the malicious prosecution.

Eagle said nobody from the petroleum company even talked to him about what happened.

Eagle, who is separated and has grown children, is living in a motel apartment in Cuyahoga Falls. He says he will use part of the money to buy a house.

In the meantime, he has gone to work in a small factory. No more gas stations for him.