

Settlement Approved By Court In Landmark Discrimination Case

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Federal District Court Judge William Hoevler has announced his preliminary approval of one of the largest settlements ever obtained in a case of racial discrimination. \$13.5 million will be paid on behalf of the owners of Caulkins Indiantown Citrus Company to resolve the damage claims of African-American workers who were subjected for years to various forms of abuse and unfair treatment based on their race. The settlement was reached days after a federal jury returned verdicts in favor of the Plaintiffs after a six week liability trial.

The Plaintiffs' litigation team was led by Searcy Denney partners Moses Baker (now Circuit Court Judge Baker) and Jack Scarola who were assisted at trial by referring lawyer, Jeff Pheterson and Peter Helwig, Executive Director of Florida Rural Legal Services. The tens of thousands of documents generated during more than a decade of discovery were organized and computer indexed by Searcy Denney support staff members Doug Harris and Marjorie Morgan. They also handled the difficult logistics of coordinating the daily transportation of witnesses and clients between Indiantown and Miami. Frequently during the lengthy trial, three chartered buses made the daily four hour



round trip to facilitate the Plaintiffs' participation in the proceedings. The costs of litigation financed by the Plaintiffs' lawyers exceeded \$1,000,000.

With twelve years of pre-trial proceedings, this was undoubtedly the longest, the most intense and the most logistically complex litigation effort in the firm's history, according to Jack Scarola. "But it has also been the most rewarding," Scarola said. "Generations of African-American residents of Indiantown were subjected to a pattern of sys-
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tematic degradation that was intended to rob them of their self-esteem and to relegate them to the least desirable and most menial job assignments. The successful prosecution of this case means far more to that community than can possibly be measured in money damages. They have been given confidence in a system of justice that had previously never worked for them. They have also been given the hope of a brighter future in which they and their children will be judged on merit rather than by the color of their skin."

In addition to individual compensation for an estimated 300 class members, the settlement will finance a scholarship fund to provide education and training for class members and their families enabling them to find an exit out of the poverty cycle. ■