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THURSDAY

Woman awarded \$2 million

AT&T must pay in harass case

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A Marina del Rey woman won \$2 million in damages after a Superior Court jury decided Tuesday that a former AT&T executive sexually harassed her six years ago.

The verdict specifies that AT&T pay former personnel manager Oksana Bihun \$1.5 million to compensate for lost income and \$500,000 in punitive damages.

Bihun, a 37-year-old attorney who currently works in the county public defender's Torrance office, alleged that she suffered nearly a year's worth of sexual advances by former Los Angeles area vice president Peter Fellows.

When she complained to top AT&T officials, they retaliated, she said. They passed her over for a promotion, demoted her, and threatened to cut her pay by \$16,000 a year, her attorney, Larry Grassini, said.

"Juries aren't crazy. They don't give money away," Grassini said.

Harass

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Before Fellows arrived, Bihun received the highest merit increase of any employee in her department and was pegged to be promoted to district manager, he said.

Fellows started working at AT&T in early 1984, and almost immediately started making sexual advances toward Bihun, Grassini said. She complained to three different AT&T officials about the situation, but action wasn't taken, he said.

In December 1984, Bihun took disability leave because of stress-related ailments. Fellows, meanwhile, resigned to work in real estate in Arizona. When Bihun returned to work in early 1985, she was demoted to a sales position and told that in a year, her salary might be decreased by \$16,000, Grassini said.

She went on disability leave again, then resigned. In Decem-

ber 1985, she filed suit.

AT&T officials, who called the award "ridiculously excessive," said they might appeal the decision. Company officials denied that Fellows influenced other executives and also denied that Bihun was demoted because of the conflict. They said she was demoted as part of a company restructuring.

"I think the company feels the amount of money is not justified by the evidence," attorney Lawrence Gartner said. "These are difficult cases to try in front of juries. It's hard to find people who are sympathetically inclined to big corporations."

Company spokeswoman Linda McDougall said AT&T has stringent regulations against sexual harassment.

She said little could be done for Bihun, however, because she didn't report the problem to the company until after Fellows had resigned.

It's the first time the company has lost any type of working conditions lawsuit in six years, she said.