

DA accused of threats and intimidation

District Attorney

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Veteran prosecutor alleges gender bias in lawsuit against county

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SANTA CRUZ — A lawsuit charging the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's office, including District Attorney Art Danner and other high-ranking prosecutors, with gender bias and unlawful employment practices was filed in Santa Cruz County Superior Court Tuesday by 18-year veteran prosecuting attorney Patty Bazar.

Danner said this morning that he has not had chance to read the document in its entirety,

but from what he has read so far he believes it is "filled with misrepresentations and distortions."

Also named in the suit, prepared by San Jose Attorney Steven Fink, are Chief Deputy District attorney Kate Canlis, Assistant District Attorney and Chief of Criminal Operations Jon Hopkins, and now-retired Assistant District Attorney Michael Bartram, who had been Bazar's immediate supervisor.

The 62-page complaint is a running narrative of allegations that Bartram treated Bazar in a

"disparaging and hostile" manner and made disparaging remarks about her to fellow workers. She says when she complained about Bartram in August 1996, both Danner and Canlis retaliated against her by upholding Bartram's decision to transfer her out of the prestigious sex-crimes unit. Bazar claims they provided no specific reasons for her demotion other than characterizing her performance as "poor," which she says was nothing more than "a pretext and a ruse."

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Bazar



Danner

BAZAR

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At that time, Danner said the decision to transfer was made by Canlis, not Bartram, but he conceded that Canlis' decision was made after consulting with Bartram. This, Bazar claims, started a year-long campaign by Bartram to discredit her by overloading her with assignments and difficult cases and then complaining about her performance.

Bazar, who is married to Watsonville Police Captain Mickey Aluffi, says she discussed the problem with Canlis again but "she was promptly dismissed with the facile notion that because Bartram was a (expletive deleted) to everyone, it could not be gender bias."

Canlis did not return phone calls for comment. This morning, Danner said, "Bartram treated people according to what he perceived their level of competency to be."

Danner said Bazar was competent, just not while she was working in the sex-crimes unit. "She has done a good job in the past but the specialized unit calls for people to be self-directed," Danner said. "At the time we transferred her we believed she needed to be out of that unit. The transfer put her back into her old job of a felony team deputy, where we believed she could be competent."

Bazar eventually lodged a complaint with the county's affirmative action officer, Ana Ventura Phares, who also looked into the incidents.

On Dec. 1, 1997, Phares issued a statement in which she said she could find no direct evidence of gen-

der bias against Bazar, but there was a perception among prosecutors that women within the office were not treated equally with men in regards to assignments or promotions.

Phares also noted that it appeared that Bazar had been subjected to retaliatory treatment. The lawsuit claims Danner responded to Phares' findings with a threat to sue the county affirmative action office with criminal charges for partly supporting Bazar's claims.

"That is preposterous. We never threatened to bring criminal action against the county affirmative action office," Danner responded. "That is ridiculous. You can't assume any fact in this lawsuit to be true."

Another example of harassment detailed in the suit was an incident that happened earlier this year, on Jan. 24. Bazar says she was lampooned by Hopkins and attorneys Gary Brayton and Paul Marigonda during the Santa Cruz County Bar Association's annual dinner. In a skit which was a spin-off of the television game show Jeopardy, her name was given along with three answers, the correct answer being "whiner."

Although Bazar's suit does not specify a dollar amount, she is asking for attorney's fees, a temporary restraining order and a permanent injunction against all the persons named in the suit, enjoining them from directly or indirectly discriminating against or harassing her.

Danner said he will not allow the controversy to affect the performance of his office. "The main thing is we don't want this to affect the staff so we can get on with the everyday business of prosecuting criminals," he said.

Previous to her assignment in Santa Cruz, Bazar had been assigned to Watsonville Municipal Court from June 1982 to May 1984. While in Watsonville, she worked closely with the police department and conducted a training program in legal points officers needed to know.