VAN NUYS AVIATION FIRM ORDERED TO PAY $1.86 MILLION TO FORMER SALESWOMAN FOR SEXUAL HARRASMENT

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A jury today ordered a Van Nuys-based aviation firm to pay $1.86 million to a former top saleswoman for the company, who alleged she was stalked on business trips by a then-FBI agent/client.

A Los Angeles Superior Court jury deliberated for less than a day before finding that 47-year-old Doreen Olson Mackey was a victim of sexual harassment and retaliation in her lawsuit against Helinet Aviation Services LLC.

The jury also concluded that Mackey was subjected to malice, oppression or fraud, setting up a second phase of trial to begin Thursday to determine whether she should be awarded punitive damages.

The jury found that Helinet was liable for the actions of Victor Grant, who is no longer with the FBI. Mackey repeatedly asked to be taken off the FBI account so she could avoid contact with Grant, but Helinet resisted because of the lucrative nature of the account and because Grant wanted her

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to remain on it, according to her attorney, Victor George.

“Helinet was not about to bite the hand that feeds them,” George told jurors during his final argument.

Helinet attorney Tracey Kennedy countered that her clients did not know when they hired Mackey that she was previously involved in a relationship with Grant.

“If you’re going to conceal everything, you’re not deserving of justice,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy showed jurors flirtatious photos and text messages exchanged between Mackey and Grant that she said showed the plaintiff was anything but a victim.

Helinet was founded by pilot Alan Purwin, who died in a Sept. 11 plane crash in Colombia during shooting of the upcoming Tom Cruise film “Mena.” Helinet provides helicopter services to a variety of clients such as celebrities, filmmakers, television stations and law enforcement, including local agencies as well as the FBI.

Mackey testified she joined Helinet in 2010 and that her contact while handling the FBI account was Grant, the unit chief of the FBI’s hostage and rescue team. She said Grant helped her get the job after speaking with Helinet executives at a trade show.

Mackey said she dated Grant before she worked at Helinet, but that she ended the relationship after she found out by accident that he was still married. But Grant persisted in pursuing Mackey, made threats against her and used his access to an FBI data base to track her flights on business trips, she said.

Grant once grabbed her by the neck, touched her inappropriately and exposed himself to her while demanding that she perform a sexual act, she testified.

In a video deposition played to the jury, Grant denied Mackey’s accusations that he threatened her or members of her family. He said the plaintiff was a self-centered person who attributed many of her problems to others.

Mackey said her Helinet bosses finally relented and she was taken off the FBI account in September 2012. But she said her travel opportunities were sharply cut back, preventing her from meeting with other clients.

Mackey said she was fired two months later.

Mackey sued Helinet in August 2013. Grant and the FBI were not defendants in the case.

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