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Business card query costs cops $82,000

A jury hands damages to a woman who questioned officers about a rough arrest

By AIMEE GREEN
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A Multnomah County jury awarded a 33-year-old woman $82,000 Thursday, saying they wanted to send Portland police a message: Hand over a business card the next time a citizen asks for one.

Several jurors who spoke to The Oregonian after the verdict in Multnomah County Circuit Court said police weren't dealing with an urgent or dangerous situation on the evening of Feb. 13, 2009 ó when Shei'Meka Newmann questioned what she thought was an unnecessarily rough arrest of a fellow MAX rider. It would have taken only a few seconds for an officer to hand Newmann a card, jurors said.

"I think that police need to be reminded that it's part of their job to de-escalate and defuse situations," said juror Chris Bolles.

After Newmann saw Officer Aaron Dauchy pull a 29-year-old black man off the train and handcuff him on the ground, she asked him why the man was under arrest. Dauchy asked her why it was her business.

She responded that she was a concerned citizen, to which Dauchy replied he didn't have to tell her unless she was the man's attorney.

Newmann then asked Dauchy's partner, Officer Jim Sandvik, for a business card. But he refused, took her ID, then said he planned to exclude her from TriMet.

Newmann
Thought arm would break

When she stepped toward the officer to read the name off his uniform and jot it down on a piece of paper, Sandvik struck her in the upper chest. He also twisted her arm so hard she thought it was going to break, before handcuffing her.

She was taken to jail and released early the next morning with no money, cellphone or shoelaces.

Sandvik, however, told a very different story. He said Newmann was screaming – and had approached him from behind as he was trying to deal with four drunken men. Sandvik also said Newmann ignored repeated lawful orders to get back.

Deputy City Attorney Jim Rice argued that officers have a legitimate reason to tell civilians to stand back when they approach from behind. Newmann said she never saw Sandvik talking to four drunken men. Part of her testimony was backed up by Officer Paul Valdez, who testified Newmann was polite and didn't do anything that could be considered interfering with an officer, which was what she was charged with doing.

The case was dismissed when Sandvik didn't show up to court. He said he had a migraine headache.

Newmann said she was hesitant to sue but did so because the students she mentors encouraged her to stand up for what is right.

Newmann, who won the 2007 Mayor's Spirit of Portland award for her with teens, is the mailroom administrator at Weiden+Kennedy.

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