

Whistle-blower lawsuit filed against Fort Pierce company

By Alisha McDarris
For Hometown News

FORT PIERCE — Last week Stuart M. Address, P.A. filed a whistle-blower suit on behalf of David Linn against Fort Pierce company Southern Truss for racial discrimination.

It's a lawsuit two years in the making, but Mr. Linn, the plaintiff, is just as passionate about seeing justice done as ever.

Mr. Linn was hired as the plant supervisor at Southern Truss in early 2012. As such he hired one African American, then a group of nine individuals, three of whom were African Americans.

Upon hearing of the new employees, the plant manager allegedly told Mr. Linn he should not have hired the African Americans, referring to them as "those people" and informing him that is was against company policy. Mr. Linn stated that the general manager and owner echoed the sentiment, using racial slang when referring to the African American employees and suggested Mr. Linn fire them.

The managers and owners also allegedly verbally harassed those employees when Mr. Linn was absent for a few days.

"I can't do anything to change the way they think, but I wanted to stand up for those individuals I knew were being discriminated against."

David Linn Former Southern Truss employee

Mr. Linn informed them that such policies and discrimination were illegal and refused to fire the employees without cause. He conducted a performance review and found two of the four African American hires were underperforming, which gave him cause to dismiss them. The other two, however, he would not terminate.

"I refused to be a part of their actions," said Mr. Linn.

As a result, Mr. Linn was let go from Southern Truss at the end of April 2012. The reason given was that his and the company's philosophies were not meshing.

Afterward, he couldn't sit by and let Southern Truss get away with their actions.

"Someone needs to make sure they can't hide behind closed doors and run a business this way and treat people this way and get away with it," Mr. Linn said. "Someone has to stand up to companies like this who are doing these things. If I don't who will?"

So the law firm of Stuart M. Address, P.A. filed a lawsuit against Southern Truss on Mr. Linn's behalf under the Florida Whistle Blower Act. It cites racial dis-

crimination in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and seeks back wages and benefits and compensatory damages.

They also want to bring the company's illegal practices to light.

"Making a decision about employment based solely upon race, particularly when the employee has already been hired and is performing well, represents such an insidious aspect of personality and disregard for the most basic civil rights that we would each expect to have. It is something that needs to be dealt with," Mr. Address said.

"I can't do anything to change the way they think, but I wanted to stand up for those individuals I knew were being discriminated against," Mr. Linn said.

Once the lawsuit is served, Southern Truss will either settle or the process of discovery, depositions, and trials will begin, stretching the case out over another 18 months to three years, according to Mr. Address.

"It's still worth the fight and the wait to hold them accountable for what they're doing," said Mr. Linn.

Southern Truss was not available for comment.