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## \$500G sex suit payout

**UNDERSHERIFF MARTIN BUDINICK** is accused of asking his co-workers for sexual favors and bragging about his genitals. He denies the allegations and continues to work for the county Sheriff's Office.



### But Sheriff's Office case not over

By **Gilbert D. Martinez**  
Journal staff writer

Hudson County will pay a total of nearly half a million dollars to settle federal sexual harassment claims brought by three women against the county and three Sheriff's Department officials, the women's lawyer said yesterday.

Sheriff's Officers Rosemarie Bellino, Patricia Stafford and former Sheriff's Officer Osiris Zunzunegui accepted the settlement offers, which come with no admission of guilt by the county, according to their attorney, D. Gayle Loftis of Hackensack.

Bellino and Zunzunegui joined an ongoing federal sexual harassment lawsuit against Undersheriff Martin Budinick in February and May 1994, accusing Budinick of asking for sexual favors, bragging about his genitals and offering to display them. Stafford joined the lawsuit in September 1995, charging Budinick with retaliation because she complained about harassment.

The lawsuit also charged former Chief Warrant Officer Edmond Monti with making Stafford and three civilian employees in the department watch him masturbate, as

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# \$500G sex suit payout in Sheriff's Office case

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well as forcing his tongue into one woman's ear while making her touch his penis and showing off a shotgun to intimidate the civilians from telling on him.

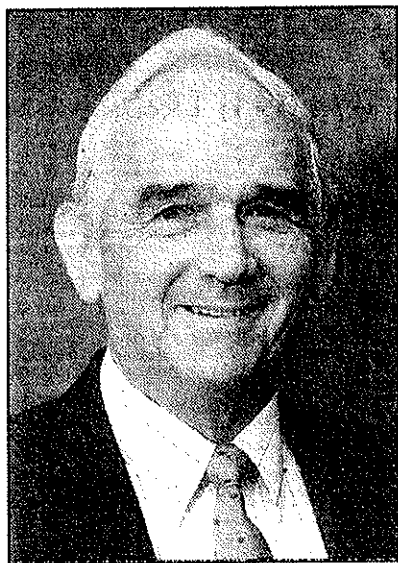
"This is an attempt for these women to get on with their lives and put a close to this matter," Loftis said after a hearing in U.S. Magistrate Joel A. Pison's courtroom in Newark, "but it doesn't fully resolve these issues."

The county will pay \$190,000 to Bellino, \$150,000 to Zunzunegui and \$115,000 to Stafford, Loftis said.

County officials could not be reached for comment, but earlier in the day yesterday, County Counsel Francis DeLeonardis said he had no comment about the matter as long as it was still pending.

Budinick has declined in the past to comment on the lawsuit, but his lawyer, Richard L. Friedman of Middletown, said his client was innocent of the charges.

"Undersheriff Budinick has denied all the allegations and continues to deny them," Friedman said. "Our position has always



**FORMER SHERIFF** Edward J. Webster is accused of knowing about the sex harassment allegations but doing nothing about them.

been that the case should be tried in a court and not in the newspapers."

Budinick's work ethic, he said, might explain why he's been the subject of allegations.

"He's a very hardworking guy and takes his job seriously,"

Friedman said. "He's a tough taskmaster, which might explain some things," he added, suggesting disgruntled employees made the complaints.

In addition to the \$455,000, the county paid \$75,000 in September in a settlement involving Helen Wallington Webb, who died in March. That settlement, which included a general admission of guilt, was accepted by Helen's husband after she died, and was approved by a U.S. magistrate judge in May.

In Loftis' law office yesterday in Hackensack, each of the women in the current settlement described it as "bittersweet."

Rose Bellino, who still works as a sheriff's officer in the administration building, said the money offer — and the large amounts — are indications of guilt to her.

"The admission of guilt is the money," Bellino said. "They were scared. They settled because they know (Budinick) is guilty. If they thought there was nothing here, they would have gone to trial with this. But they didn't."

Despite the largest payment by the county yet, Bellino said she's still upset because Budinick

is still working in the Sheriff's Office.

Zunzunegui agreed.

"By allowing him to stay there, this (sexual harassment) is going to keep happening," said Zunzunegui, who left the sheriff's department in April 1994 and moved to Missouri. "Why is he still there? That's the question."

*"No matter what amount they offered, it couldn't compare with the torture I was put through."*

**PATRICIA STAFFORD**  
Sergeant says she was harassed

For Patricia Stafford, who is a sergeant in the sheriff's department's Missing Persons Bureau, no amount of money can remove the experience she says she had with Monti.

"No matter what amount they offered, it couldn't compare with the torture I was put through," Stafford, 44, said. "I can't believe

they just suspended (Monti) and let him retire in good standing."

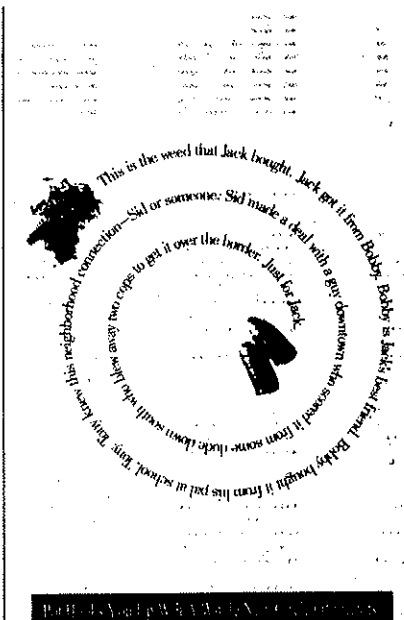
While the case is settled for these three women and Webb, the matter continues for three other women — Sheriff's Officer Rosemary Frank and civilian employees Julie Nolan and Patricia Gonzalez.

Loftis declined to comment about the case involving Nolan and Gonzalez. Loftis had represented Frank up until last week, when Frank dropped Loftis and retained another attorney, Clifford L. Van Syoc of Cherry Hill. Van Syoc could not be reached for comment.

Former Sheriff Edward J. Webster, also named in the suit, is accused of knowing about the sex harassment allegations, but doing nothing about them. The county, which is paying for three lawyers for the defendants, is also named in the suit.

Webster's lawyer, Mark A. Infante of West Orange, said he could not comment about the lawsuit because it was still pending, but he defended his client.

"Sheriff Webster acted above board in the best interest of the county at all times," Infante said. He said Webster had no comment.



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## TIMELINE

■ **October 1993:** Hudson County Sheriff's Officer Rosemary Frank files a federal civil lawsuit against Undersheriff Martin Budinick, accusing him of ignoring obscene graffiti depicting her and then making obscene comments about her.

■ **February 1994:** The lawsuit is amended and Sheriff's Officer Rosemarie Bellino joins the suit, charging Budinick with sticking his hand down her shirt and asking her to perform sexual favors.

■ **May 1994:** Fellow Sheriff's Officer Osiris Zunzunegui joins the federal lawsuit, accusing Budinick of bragging about the size of his genitals and offering to display them. Zunzunegui also charges Budinick retaliated against her by changing her work hours, forcing her to lose a second job.

■ **March 1995:** Three civilian employees of the sheriff's detective bureau — Julie Nolan, Patricia Gonzalez and Helen Wallington Webb — accuse the Sheriff's Office Chief Warrant Officer, Edmond Monti, of sexual harassment. Monti made the women watch him masturbate, forced his tongue in one woman's mouth while making her touch his penis and tried intimidating the women by showing them a shotgun near his office desk, according to the suit, which is joined to the federal lawsuit against Budinick.

■ **May 1995:** Monti is suspended from the Sheriff's Office. He retires five months later, in October.

■ **September 1995:** Patricia Stafford joins the case and accuses Monti of fostering a hostile work environment, fondling her and making her watch him masturbate. She further charges that Budinick retaliated against her by holding up a promotion. All of the women charge that former Sheriff Edward J. Webster knew about the harassment but did nothing to stop it and did not have a sexual harassment policy in place.

■ **March 1996:** Hudson County makes an offer to the women. If they accept \$75,000, the county will accept a judgment against themselves, which includes an admission of guilt and prevents a trial. Six of the women refuse the offer, but Thomas Webb accepts the money after his wife, Helen Wallington Webb, dies of cancer on March 8. U.S. Magistrate Judge Joel A. Pisano approves the deal in May, allowing Thomas Webb to accept the settlement in his wife's place.

■ **Oct. 7, 1996:** Rosemarie Bellino, Patricia Stafford and former officer Osiris Zunzunegui agree to settle the case. The county admits no guilt. Under the agreement, the county will pay \$190,000 to Bellino, \$150,000 to Zunzunegui and \$115,000 to Stafford, according to their lawyer.