

THE JERSEY JOURNAL

Saturday, January 13, 2001

Five charge Jail warden abused power, attorney charges

abuses by jail warden

By Journal staff

NEWARK — Just as Jersey City had Mayor Frank “I am the law” Hague, the Hudson County jail had Ralph “I am the warden” Green, an attorney said during her opening statement yesterday in a federal civil case brought by five corrections officers who claim they were the victims of Green’s reign of retaliation, discrimination and mismanagement.

Attorney Gayle Loftis of Hackensack, representing the plaintiffs, told jurors they will learn during the trial that the Hudson County Correctional Center was a microcosm of Hudson County itself while Green was at the helm in the 1990s.

“Hudson County. Just to hear the words, something comes into your mind — political hints of corruption, or abuse of power,” Loftis told the jury, seated before U.S. District Court Judge John Bissell. Like Hague, said Loftis, Green ruled with an iron hand to the detriment of ordinary, working people — people like the five superior corrections officers she represents.

Green, she said, systematically eroded the chain of command within the jail and compromised security by forming a clique of favorites who included both civilian employees and even inmates who were entitled to special privileges.

Those privileges, she said, included giving his assistant, civilian jail employee Eugene Drayton, a gun and a badge even though he was not a corrections officer. In other cases, according to Loftis, Green formed a jail choir composed of favored

Continued from Page A1

inmates. In that case, the inmates were transported to various churches without even being shackled, she said.

Some of these favored inmates were given other “extras” that compromised security and broke down respect for corrections officers who were not in Green’s clique, she said.

“Prisoners could walk the halls of the jail, without being questioned,” she said. “All they had to do was show a note by Ralph Green and say, ‘This is my permission to walk around.’”

In other cases, certain inmates were allowed to intermingle with visiting family members without proper supervision, she

said.

“That’s one of the ways security can be affected — drugs can come in, other things can come in,” she said.

When the plaintiffs brought these and other issues to the attention of various authorities, like the county administrator and the Hudson County Prosecutor’s Office, the state Department of Corrections conducted an audit of jail operations. The state ultimately took control of the facility in January 1995 and removed Green.

None of the changes in jail operations made by the state affected the positions of the five superior corrections officers who brought the suit at hand, Loftis noted.

When Green was restored to his position in 1997 as head of the jail, she said, he began retaliating against the officers for speaking out against him. One of the plaintiffs, who is a deputy warden with many years of service at the jail, had his picture removed from the jail entrance, according to Loftis. His photo was placed behind an American flag where it was barely visible, and in its place, a picture of Drayton — Green’s civilian assistant — was hung, she said.

In another instance, one of the plaintiff’s parking spots was relocated, according to Loftis. And in yet another case, one of the officers was unfairly reprimanded for hitting a corrections trainee, even though the officer insisted

he only shoved him, according to the suit. The officer was further humiliated by staff memos ordering that he not come into contact with other trainees, the suit states.

Loftis said the plaintiffs also charge that Green, who is black, used inappropriate racial remarks around them and other officers. “He called himself the ‘Head n—r in charge’ . . . he called them ‘crackers’ . . . he called them ‘rednecks’ . . . These are offensive remarks to people of all color. They were vulgar and crude, to say the least,” she said.

Testimony will also show that when Green returned, he warned jail supervisors not to talk about him to anyone and, in referring to the plaintiffs said, “These crack-

in opening statement

ers tried to put my a— out on the street,” Loftis said.

“What followed when he came back in 1997 is that the ‘crackers who tried to put his a— out on the street’ were subjected to a number of acts that were demeaning. . . . There will be evidence that when Ralph Green came back, he had antagonism, hostility and a great deal of anger . . . against these plaintiffs,” she said.

Bissell adjourned the trial for the day before Loftis completed her opening statement and before defense attorneys Ralph Lamparello, representing the county, and Alexander Booth, representing Green, began their opening remarks to the jury. Opening statements continue on Tuesday. The defense plans to argue

that the plaintiffs — who were all in the superior officers union — were motivated to badmouth Green because of friction that emerged in the midst of contract negotiations.

After the jury was dismissed for the day, Lamparello strenuously objected to some of Loftis’ remarks as “unprofessional” and “inappropriate,” especially the ones about Hudson County’s purported history of political corruption and her comparisons of Green to Hague. But the judge denied Lamparello’s request to instruct the jury to disregard the remarks.

The plaintiffs are Dennis Woods, Paul Wadleigh, Robert Kenny, Joseph Flynn and David Krusznis.