



* *

Local News

Business partner of Victor Guru wins lawsuit *by JOHN CRAMER - Ravalli Republic*

The former business partner of a self-styled spiritual guru in Victor was awarded nearly \$800,000 on Thursday in a civil case in Ravalli District Court.

Judge Jeff Langton awarded John Watson \$730,000 in compensatory damages and about \$46,000 in attorney fees and costs, but denied his request for \$300,000 in punitive damages.

Watson, a British native who now lives in Canada, sued Devra Patton West in 2003 for breach of contract, fraud and unjust enrichment.

The case was heard in Ravalli County because West's home and business operations - the Divine Unity Foundation and the Sacred Archives Institute - were in Victor, where Watson also lived. *

Langton entered a default judgment against West, who calls herself Surya Ma, on July 16 after she failed to show up for a number of court hearings and to respond to court deadlines.

West did not attend Thursday's hearing. Her business manager, Geoff Reynolds, attended but declined to comment and said West would not comment.

Watson said West was a "crook" who operated a "cult." He said she "brainwashed" people into giving her money - in part by falsely claiming to have a doctor of philosophy degree and a doctor of divinity degree - and turned them into "slaves" who did menial tasks at her bidding.

"She trolls for people who are spiritually confused and looking for a guru," Watson said. "She has some spiritual abilities and a pretty extensive record of charisma and the ability to capture people's attention. She's very believable. That's how I got sucked in."

Watson, a business management consultant, testified that he became involved with West after he attended one of her healing sessions in Victor in 2001.

West said God had told her to set up a group of for-profit companies and non-profit groups called Millennia Mind to make banking more altruistic, Watson testified.

He said he considered the venture to be a solid investment and that he and West realized they were a "perfect match" of spiritual and business skills to make Millennia Mind come true.

Watson testified that he, West and a third partner signed a contract, which included an agreement that Watson's initial annual salary would be \$50,000 to \$60,000.

After five years, his salary would increase to about \$120,000 and the venture would invite other stockholders and investors, Watson testified.

But six months after becoming partners, West said God had given her another message - "that shareholders and corporations were a thing of the past" - and that she wanted to dissolve Millennia Mind, Watson said.

Watson's attorney, Dave McLean of Missoula, played a tape recording of a March 2003 meeting between Watson and West that ended in a profane tirade by the self-styled clairvoyant and spiritual healer.

Watson, who taped the meeting, was heard telling West she couldn't simply walk away from a contractual agreement.

Watson told her that she disposed of "a lot of people like Kleenex" and "you will not do that to me."

Watson and McLean said they were satisfied with Langton's decision, although it's unclear when they may collect any damages from West. They said she has made millions of dollars but now claims bankruptcy.

McLean said West could be held in contempt and jailed if she did not pay the damages within a reasonable time.

West now lives in Lakeside, where she has discussed setting up healing spas. She has a number of other for-profit and non-profit ventures.

non-profit ventures.

West also has been involved in criminal and civil legal cases in Flathead County, including filing a libel suit against Watson.

West pleaded no contest earlier this year to assaulting a Whitefish doctor who also was a former business partner. West was sentenced to a six-month deferred jail term and a \$500 fine.

According to her book "The Christ Heart," West has been trained in shamanist visioning and healing and can channel telepathic messages from Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed and other spiritual leaders.

Reporter John Cramer can be reached at 363-3300 or jcramer@ravallirepublic.com

Reader's Comments >>

B.D. wrote on Oct 2, 2008 10:50 PM:

" And if you are enough of an egghead to believe that kind of crap, then you deserve to be fleeced. It amazes me to read this that people can be smart enough to make big money being Dr's and business men and women, only to be stupid enough to invest it with self styled guru's and cult leaders. Soft minded fools "

Add Your Own Comments >>

Name:

Email: (optional)

Comments:



 • [E-MAIL STORY](#)  • [PRINT STORY](#)