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Jury split in discrimination case

Allentown and ex-employee
each declare victory after trial

By Lindsay Weber
THE MORNING CALL

After a three-day trial in federal court, a jury issued a mixed verdict in a former Allentown employee's discrimination lawsuit against the city, leading both sides to declare victory.

According to court documents, a jury found the city not liable in the firing of former

human resources generalist Karen Ocasio, after demonstrating a "legitimate, non-retaliatory reason" for her firing.

However, jurors also said they believed Ocasio's termination was connected to her filing of discrimination complaints, and that she "has proven by a preponderance of evidence that there is a 'but for' causal connection between the materially adverse action (termination) and the protected activity (complaints of discrimination)."

The mixed verdict has led to different



Karen Ocasio,

interpretations among the two parties, both of which are declaring themselves the victor in the lawsuit.

"A jury found the City not liable in the discrimination case, determining that the City had a legitimate reason for the employee's termination and that the City did not retaliate against the employee," Allentown spokesperson Chelsea Koerbler said in a written statement. "The City remains committed to ensuring that Allentown is a welcoming and respectful place to work, where every employee feels valued and supported."

However, Marc Weinstein, Ocasio's lawyer, said in an interview Thursday with The Morning Call, "We declare ourselves the winner."

Regardless of the other two findings, the jury found that there was a causal connection between Ocasio's complaints of discrimination and her termination, meaning that the city violated laws related to retaliation and protected workplace activity, Weinstein argued.

"The jury also found that there were other

See TRIAL on Page A2



Carol Kasick pets a goat Wednesday at the Phoebe Home in Allentown. MONICA CABRERA/MORNING CALL PHOTOS

When the zoo comes to you

A variety of friendly animals — including rabbits, goats and a calf — from Quiver Farm Projects in Pennsburg brought plenty of smiles and memorable moments Wednesday at the Phoebe Home in Allentown.



Diane Kendra, left, the Community Life Coordinator at Phoebe Home, and residents Connie Fritz and Beverly Maroon cuddle a rabbit.

Apartment building opens in Allentown

By Evan Jones
THE MORNING CALL

City Center Group reached a milestone Wednesday with the opening of the Standard apartments in downtown Allentown, the developer's 15th residential building in the city.

A group of officials from City Center and the Lehigh Valley were on hand to cut the ribbon on the four-story building that stands at 111 N. Sixth St. and has 257 units.

"One of the things that makes this building special is that it is a model of attainability by design," said Zach Sienicki, City Center's chief operating officer. "The Standard was intentionally designed to deliver quality without inflating the cost."

Rent for a studio apartment begins at about \$1,290 per month and goes up to \$2,015 per month for two bedrooms. There are 130 studios, 89 one-bedroom and 38 two-bedroom apartments.

Amenities include high-speed internet, a fitness center, dog park, courtyard with fire pits, and a private pedestrian bridge connecting directly to a parking deck across Sixth Street. Residents pay a fee for parking, along with a \$60 amenities fee.

The pet-friendly apartments feature vinyl-wood plank flooring, washer and dryers, open kitchens, luxury bathrooms and stainless-steel appliances.

Sienicki said the building is already 15%

See STANDARD on Page A3

48 years later, murder remains unsolved

Husband still seeks answers
in wife's death in Nazareth

By Laurie Mason Schroeder
THE MORNING CALL

Scott Miller was never named a suspect in his wife's brutal 1978 murder in Nazareth. But as decades passed and Sandy Miller's slaying remained unsolved, the sideways glances and suspicious whispers bothered Miller more and more.

"I'm 71 now and I don't want to leave this world with a question mark attached to my name," he said.

Miller, who now lives in Lenhartsville, Berks County, is determined to solve his 22-year-old wife's murder. He's written a book about the killing, which occurred 48 years ago this week, and has been working with a private investigator to gather clues.

In his book, "The Buried Truth: The Brutal Murder and Collateral Cover-Up of Sandy Miller," Miller describes what he believes was a botched investigation by

small-town law enforcement officers who allowed curious locals to gawk at the crime scene and possibly contaminate evidence.

He complains that Sandy Miller's slaying, which occurred while their 10-month-old daughter was in the home, has received less attention from law enforcement than other Northampton County cold cases, such as the 1979 slaying of Bethlehem teen Holly Branagan, and the murder of Realtor Charlotte Fimiano in 1997 in Lower

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Scott Miller talks Sept. 10 about the unsolved murder of his wife, Sandy, 48 years ago. SHARON MERKEL/SPECIAL TO THE MORNING CALL

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