

Officers posed as Klansmen, sex bias trial records show

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Two Des Moines police officers donned white Ku Klux Klan hoods and robes in 1984 in an attempt to scare a black officer, according to court documents involved in a former police-woman's lawsuit against the city.

Deborah Lynch, a former Des Moines police officer, testified Thursday that she was sexually harassed by two fellow officers and that one of those officers also excluded a black officer from a police retirement party because of his race.

Although the trial on Lynch's lawsuit against the city dealt primarily with allegations of sexual harassment, testimony of racial discrimination is included in sworn statements taken in the case.

Officers Suspended

In one of those statements, Sgt. Dale Anderson said that in 1984, officers William Breman and John Scarpino dressed up like Ku Klux Klan members to scare officer Walt Bevel, who is black, when he was on duty at Hawthorne Park.

Anderson said the officers were wearing the white robes over their uniforms. They were suspended after a complaint was filed by a police sergeant with the internal affairs department, said Anderson. He didn't mention the length of the suspensions.

Anderson said a police dispatcher, Gerald Madero, also was involved in the incident, but he did not elaborate.

"It was some sergeant that med-

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Deborah Lynch
Tells of racial harassment

dled into it that caused the big stink about it," said the statement of another officer, Richard Schuett. "It was an initiation into the squad to welcome [Bevel] aboard."

Schuett said the Klan prank was a way of making Bevel feel welcome. "There was another officer that asked why he didn't get it done to him,

LYNCH

Please turn to Page 8A

LYNCH

Continued from Page One

another black officer," Schuett said. "He felt left out."

In her courtroom testimony, Lynch said officer Merlin Nielsen refused to invite black police officer Franklin Irvin to a retirement party for Sgt. Joseph Godfroy. She testified that Nielsen was having the party at his home and told her "he would not let a nigger in his home."

Nielsen has denied in a sworn deposition that race had anything to do with Irvin being excluded from Godfroy's party.

But Schuett's statement indicates that Nielsen also told him that Irvin wasn't invited because of his race.

Lynch testified Thursday that she was sexually harassed daily by Nielsen and officer Timothy Lynch. She said the men sometimes made crude comments to her in front of superiors without being disciplined.

The Lynches are not related.

Lynch's lawsuit accuses the city of failing to protect her right to work as a police officer in an environment free of sexual harassment.

Nielsen, who resigned in 1987, and Timothy Lynch have admitted in sworn depositions that they harassed Deborah Lynch. But they said they only jokingly asked her to have sex while on duty.

Lynch said that she was subjected to lewd comments and obscene language and that Lynch and Nielsen asked her to perform sex acts on the job. The officers also made the statements in front of superiors. The harassment worsened after she complained, she said.

"The conduct actually began when I started at the police department. It happened on a daily basis," said Lynch, 29, who became an officer in 1979 and resigned earlier this year.

Lynch said she would often go drinking with male officers "to be a team player." She said she also would occasionally use profanity but never made sexually suggestive statements to male officers.

She said she tried to ignore Nielsen

or called him a "pervert" when he would unzip his pants in public and ask her to perform a sex act.

During the trial Thursday, Deborah Lynch testified that male officers posted pornographic pictures and sexually suggestive cartoons in the police department where other female officers could see them. She said the cartoons sometimes were located in places where the public could view them.

Lynch testified that she was the target of retaliation in 1985 and 1986 after she filed a formal complaint about the harassment with the internal affairs division in March 1985.

She said the retaliation included harassment about her appearance by superiors, complaints about spending too much time with a rape victim, an order to pick up human feces from a street and delays or no response to her requests for help in responding to dangerous calls.

Lynch said she was reprimanded in 1986 for having an intimate relationship with Cpt. Ronald Babb, who subsequently was suspended for 30 days without pay. Before her relationship with Babb, Lynch said she had an affair with another police officer for seven years, which ended in 1984.

Under cross-examination by City Attorney Ivan Webber, Lynch said not all female officers may have been subjected to sexual harassment, and she didn't know if any of the women officers would support her allegations.

Lynch also said she didn't mention the offensive cartoons when she was questioned by internal affairs.

Lynch admitted when she complained in 1985 about the stress associated with the harassment on her job — and was consulting doctors for treatment — she filed a lawsuit alleging emotional distress resulting from a car accident in October 1984.

She said she received a settlement from the suit and didn't mention that her job also was contributing to her stress.