

EMU settles employee bias lawsuit

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YPSILANTI — A former employee at Eastern Michigan University, fired after only 10 days on the job, has won \$30,000 from EMU to settle a lawsuit in which EMU was accused of housing bias against Asian students.

Mary Vaughn claimed in a Washtenaw County Circuit Court suit that she was fired as resident manager of EMU's Cornell Courts Apartments in August 1991 after refusing her supervisor's instructions not to rent apartments to Asian students.

Pam Kisch, executive director of the county's Fair Housing Center in Ann Arbor, said Vaughn was told by her boss not to rent to Asian students — particularly Chinese students — because they frequently cooked in open woks, which would attract roaches and add to the complex's roach problem.

But EMU lawyers Wednesday denied that the university discriminates against

any students, and said that despite Vaughn's claim of anti-Asian bias, the case centered on whether she was legally terminated.

Ann Arbor attorney Fulton Eaglin, who represented EMU in the lawsuit, said Vaughn was fired while still a probationary employee for "not doing the job."

"We paid money to get her to go away because we didn't want the hassle," he said. A trial, said Eaglin, would have been even costlier to EMU.

Michael Constant, director of university apartments and Vaughn's former supervisor, did not return telephone calls from The News.

Vaughn, who now works for the Livingston Educational Service Agency's Head Start program in Howell, could not be reached for comment.

But in a news release prepared by the Fair Housing Center, Vaughn is quoted as saying, "I hope EMU will not ignore future complaints about Michael Constant, and I hope that what happened at Cornell

Courts will not be repeated. One of the great things about student housing is the chance for people from all over the world to live in a shared community."

Kisch said Vaughn contacted the Fair Housing Center after her firing, and the center sent "testers" to Cornell Courts to check into possible housing bias.

"The white tester was shown vacant apartments and the Asian tester was told that nothing was available for her to see," said Kisch. "The fact that this happened at a state-funded public university is an outrage. I'm sure the students, staff and alumni of EMU could come up with more productive ways to spend \$30,000."

University attorney Kenneth McKanders, however, said Wednesday that about 3 percent of EMU's approximately 25,000 students are of Asian background, while from 26 to 34 percent of Cornell Courts' residents are Asian.

He also said that since Vaughn's firing, the complex has continued to sign leases with Asian students.

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