

County of Contra Costa

PRESS

RELEASE

Office of the Sheriff

Warren E. Rupf

Sheriff

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TO: **News/Assignment Desk or News Editor**

Federal Jury Clears Deputy Sheriff of All Wrongdoing

A federal jury has cleared Contra Costa County Deputy Sheriff Jason Ingrassia of all charges in a federal civil suit which alleged a number of civil rights violations. The trial of Abhinav Bhatnagar v. Jason Ingrassia took place before Judge Charles R. Breyer of the United States District Court, Northern District of California in San Francisco. The jury arrived at a verdict on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 after a trial that lasted five days. The jury returned its verdict after deliberating for less than one hour.

Bhatnagar filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Ingrassia, Contra Costa County and the city of San Ramon saying Ingrassia falsely arrested him for driving under the influence, made racist comments and retaliated against him for complaining. Ingrassia was assigned as a police officer in the city of San Ramon when he stopped Bhatnagar off Bollinger Canyon Road on May 20, 2006 (the Sheriff's Office provided police services to San Ramon through a contract at that time).

"The vast majority of California Peace Officers conduct themselves in a sensitive and constitutionally correct manner. Deputy Ingrassia is one these honorable professionals," said Contra Costa County Sheriff Warren E. Rupf. "In earlier lower court action, untruthful testimony and mediocre judicial oversight allowed Deputy Ingrassia's character to be slandered. This federal jury and Judge Breyer have restored to him what was unjustly taken."

During the trial evidence was introduced that the plaintiff fabricated much of his testimony. Among some of the accusations that the jury cleared Ingrassia of were false arrest, retaliation, intimidation and the infliction of emotional distress. Additionally the jury decided that the plaintiff was not entitled to any damages.

In his comments after the verdict, Judge Breyer said Bhatnagar did not give credible testimony, while Ingrassia was entirely credible in his testimony. Judge Breyer said, "...it appears to me to be absolutely correct that the defendant (Ingrassia) was not trolling for drunk drivers the night of the arrest, and that he did not pick on the defendant because of his race. And that there is no evidence whatsoever of racism or profiling in anything the defendant did."

Judge Breyer's remarks supersede earlier comments made by a Contra Costa County Superior Court judge who dismissed the DUI charge and accused Ingrassia of profiling. At the time of the accusations, a Sheriff's Office internal investigation cleared Ingrassia of any wrongdoing. He continues to remain on duty with the Sheriff's Office.

"It is my sincere hope that greedy plaintiffs, predatory attorneys and at least one local Judge read this jury's verdict together with the comments of the Court," said Sheriff Rupf. "The jury needed less than one hour to vindicate our Deputy. Judge Breyer demonstrated leadership and courage by shining judicial light on those that had purposely maligned Deputy Ingrassia's character or condoned the attacks."

Deputy Jason Ingrassia was represented by Jim Fitzgerald and Noah Blechman of McNamara, Dodge, Ney, Beatty, Slattery, Pfalzer, Borges & Brothers LLP and Greg Harvey and Jan Holmes, County Counsel, Contra Costa County.

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For more information, please call:

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