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Published Wednesday, October 27, 2004

Black Workers Accuse Lowe's of Discrimination

By [Merissa Green](#)
The Ledger

WINTER HAVEN -- Ten former and current employees with Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse in Winter Haven filed a racial discrimination lawsuit against the company Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Tampa.

No trial date has been set.

The employees, all of whom are black, claimed that the former manager, Vince Piccolo, passed over black employees for promotions and some of them were ordered to clean bathrooms even though that was not part of their job description.

Piccolo was transferred from the Winter Haven store at 700 Third St. S.W. to the Lowe's store in Brandon last year.

He's now working at the Clearwater store, said Chris Ahearn, Lowe's spokeswoman.

His moves have nothing to do with the charges of racism, she said.

"Our store managers move around from time to time," she said.

The eight former and two current Winter Haven Lowe's employees are seeking back pay, and damages for emotional pain and suffering, humiliation and mental anguish.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are Corey Williams, Dawn Black, Shamika Britt, Rivelyno Jean, Javon McDowald, Sinclair McJolly, Calvin Smith, Archley Bissereth, Alvin Catholic and Joe Davila, according to the lawsuit.

Terry Smiljanich, one of three lawyers for the employees, said there was a consistent pattern of discrimination against the black employees.

"It's certainly had a profound impact on all their lives and they want to see this matter put to rest and see that justice is served," said Smiljanich, of James, Hoyer, Necomer & Smiljanich, P.A. in Tampa.

Lowe's officials have not seen the lawsuit and could not comment on the case, Ahearn said.

But Ahearn said the company is aware of a complaint filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission last year. In its official notice issued in August, EEOC officials said they could not determine whether a civil rights violation had occurred.

Britt, who lives in Lake Alfred, was employed at Lowe's from December 2000 to April 2004. She said she was passed over four times for the head cashier position.

On the third occasion, the position was offered to a white employee who said that Britt, 27, was a more qualified candidate, Britt has said.

Britt said it was a slap in the face that employees she trained were being promoted over her.

"It made me resistant about going to work," she said. "They had less experience."



Shamika Britt of Lake Alfred says she quit her job with Lowe's after she was passed over for promotion four times. She is one of 10 current and former Lowe's employees suing the company, alleging racial bias. PAUL JOHNSON/The Ledger

Williams, 33, who lives in Haines City, said he worked as a department manager before Piccolo arrived. Williams joined the company in April 2001.

Williams said Piccolo did not watch the other department managers as much as he watched him and he was required to clean up trash brought to his work area from other departments.

Williams said he asked to be demoted to his previous position of customer service representative because of the way Piccolo treated him.

In September 2002 he requested to be promoted to sales specialist.

He said Piccolo told him that he didn't have the experience for sales specialist. Three weeks later, a white employee who Williams trained was given the position, he said.

Williams said he tried to apply for a position in the appliance department and several weeks later the position was given to a white employee who was a transfer.

After repeatedly being denied advancement, Williams resigned from the company on April 3, 2003.

Williams said he feels good that the lawsuit has been finally filed in court.

"Hopefully, this will make (Lowe's) lead in the right direction towards minorities," he said.

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