



## **Managing Partner for Tully Rinckey PLLC discusses the case of client Sheila Langfeldt-Abbott in the Dispatch.**

### **Arsenal supervisor subject of federal lawsuit**

**June 22, 2014 By Rachel Warmke**

**&nbsp;A Rock Island Arsenal employee has filed a discrimination lawsuit claiming her supervisor was repeatedly aggressive, demoralizing and drunk on the job. Sheila Langfeldt-Abbott says she was consistently berated, ridiculed and threatened while under the supervision of Jerry DeLaCruz, a chief of staff at the Army Sustainment Command, from August 2009 through July 2013. Her suit states that, after she received no response to numerous internal complaints, she filed a federal lawsuit in 2012 against U.S. Secretary of the Army John McHugh. After two years of negotiations, the case now is scheduled for trial Dec. 8 in the U.S. District Court in Rock Island. A final pretrial conference is set for Nov. 4. Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott began working at the Arsenal in 1989. Her suit, filed Dec. 14, 2012, states that during the 3.5 years she worked under Mr. DeLaCruz in the Resource Management division, he threw things at her, made ridiculing comments in front of others and "backed her into a corner and threatened her." Mr. DeLaCruz graduated from the Army War College and was an overseas general before retiring from the Army Reserves, according to an online profile. He began working in civilian positions in 1988. Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott graduated from the Comptroller Career Program and received the highest level of both Army Acquisition Corp training in Business, Cost and Finance and Department of the Army Comptroller Accreditation. "I believed in the Army training....," Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott said, "I believed they would never subject people to this." The suit says Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott, 47, of Davenport, was among a group of female employees whom Mr. DeLaCruz**

would perpetually berate and criticize, creating "a hostile work environment on the basis of her age and sex." Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott had to cover for Mr. DeLaCruz when "he was too drunk to do so," an addendum to the suit says. It claims multiple complaints against Mr. DeLaCruz by other employees also were not addressed appropriately by senior management. "It was very common for him to leave two to three hours over his lunch hour and come back, and it was clear he was impaired," Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott said, adding she witnessed Mr. DeLaCruz stumble into a filing cabinet and display slurred speech. Mr. DeLaCruz is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit. An answer to the complaint, filed by Mr. McHugh's attorneys in March 2013, denied all alleged wrongdoing and discrimination on the part of Mr. DeLaCruz. Dan Carlson, a spokesman for Army Sustainment Command at the Arsenal, declined to comment on the suit Thursday, saying it was policy not to speak on pending litigation. In March 2010, the suit claims Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott was passed over for a promotion to assistant deputy director in favor of a male employee who was younger with less experience and training. The suit says the man turned down the job, saying Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott was more qualified. After the position was opened up to all employees, Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott said she was selected for the role by an "unbiased panel" in December 2010. After her suit was filed, Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott said she continued to work "side-by-side" with Mr. DeLaCruz until July 2013 when they were both reassigned to other positions. She became chief of finances in the logistics department, a move that took her away from her 24-year career in resource management and reduced her budget and staff. She said Mr. DeLaCruz was temporarily moved into a deputy chief position but, soon after, was given a director position. The continued beratement and "hostile work environment" fostered under Mr. DeLaCruz's supervision took a toll on her sleep and health, Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott wrote in the suit. She is represented in the case by the Tully Rinckey law firm, of New York, and Stephen Fieweger, of the Moline-based firm Katz, Huntooh, & Fieweger. Her attorneys say multiple attempts to settle the case over the past two years have been unsuccessful. "It's really an embarrassment to the Army," said Greg Rinckey, one of her attorneys. "This is the epitome, in my opinion, of a toxic leader." Mr. Rinckey said he was "mystified" as to why no meaningful action had been taken against Mr. DeLaCruz, despite numerous internal complaints against him by other staff members. Approximately 10

letters from other Arsenal employees, on behalf of Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott, have been filed as an addendum to the suit. They claim Mr. DeLaCruz displayed a history of discrimination against older female employees, including speaking harshly and making jokes about their abilities to keep up with work-related tasks. Several said they had witnessed mental and verbal harassment by Mr. DeLaCruz against Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott. "His temper is well known in the office, and people are afraid to stick up for themselves ... or to come forward for fear of reprisal or retaliation," wrote the man who turned down the assistant deputy position. He listed several instances where Ms. Langfeldt-Abbott was excluded from meetings or

treated as inferior. "He (Mr. DeLaCruz) does not work with older females that are knowledgeable and does all that he can to discredit them," wrote another co-worker, a woman in her 50s who worked in Resource Management at the Arsenal. She added, "It has been so disheartening to see how one person can be protected by so many at the expense of someone willing to step up and call out the bad behavior."