

## Local News

### **Iowa Central, Conrad agree to end lawsuit**

---

Former veteran instructor to get \$75,000 settlement

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

*POSTED: March 14, 2009*

A court fight that pitted former Iowa Central Community College instructor Mary Conrad against the school where she taught for 31 years has ended.

The college and its insurance provider will pay Conrad \$75,000 under a settlement announced Friday by college officials and Conrad.

In return, she will drop the lawsuit in which she claimed former college President Robert Paxton told leaders of Buena Vista University to stop employing her at their Fort Dodge center. That center is on the grounds of Iowa Central. Conrad worked as an adjunct professor there after retiring from Iowa Central.

The lawsuit in Webster County District Court will be dismissed with prejudice, which is a legal move that prevents Conrad from refileing it in the future.

"I feel wonderful," Conrad said Friday afternoon. "I feel tremendous relief that this is done."

Mark Crimmins, president of Iowa Central's board of directors, said the college and its insurer paid the settlement instead of Paxton because "any actions he took were in his capacity as president."

The college will pay \$50,000 of the total and the insurance company will pay \$25,000. Crimmins didn't know the name of the insurer.

"Mary Conrad dedicated a majority of her professional career instructing students at Iowa Central Community College and there is no question that she was an educator at heart," Crimmins said. "Notwithstanding differences she had with Dr. Paxton during his tenure as president at Iowa Central, he had no legal right to interfere with her employment opportunities with Buena Vista University. It is the board's sincere hope that with the settlement of this matter, Mary Conrad can now truly enjoy her retirement."

A call seeking comment from Paxton, who is now the president of online learning at National American University in Rapid City, S.D., was not returned.

The lawsuit was an outgrowth of a transcript-fraud scandal that erupted at Iowa Central in 2002 and ended with three college officials pleading guilty to charges that they tampered with records.

The transcript case involved complaints that the grades of some athletes were changed. A grand jury indicted Paxton; Tom Beneke, vice president of enrollment management and student development; Dennis Pilcher, athletic director; and Kevin Twait, the head football coach.

Charges against Paxton were dismissed.

Beneke pleaded guilty to two counts of tampering with records and Pilcher pleaded guilty to one count of the same offense. Twait pleaded guilty to one count of aiding and abetting tampering with records. All three were required to complete 60 hours of community service. College leaders suspended them for two weeks without pay and placed them on administrative leave.

Long before those punishments were imposed, Conrad publicly stated that all the college officials involved should be placed on leave until their cases were resolved. That, she claimed, provoked Paxton.

"The center director called me and said they would not be allowed to hire me again because Bob Paxton didn't want me on his campus" Conrad said.

She said that happened in 2004.

In 2007, Conrad's lawsuit was dismissed by District Court Judge Joel Swanson. But in July 2008, the Iowa Court of Appeals ruled that the case must go to trial. The settlement announced Friday ended the need for a trial which was scheduled to begin April 7.

Contact Bill Shea at (515) 573-2141 or [bshea@messengernews.net](mailto:bshea@messengernews.net)