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Clerk won Lotto, jury rules



Arwa Farraj, who a Pomona jury ruled Tuesday was the rightful owner of a winning Lotto ticket worth \$8 million.

Panel finds boss stole Circle K worker's ticket

By **MICHELLE RESTER**
STAFF WRITER

A Pomona jury ruled Tuesday in favor of a woman who claimed her boss stole her winning \$8 million SuperLotto ticket.

The verdict ended a nearly four-year ordeal for 26-year-old Arwa Farraj, who had worked at the Circle K on D Street in La Verne for two weeks when the theft took place in 1999.

As jurors filed past her with congratulations and wishes of a happy life and healthy eating, a tearful Farraj hugged her brothers, mother and attorney, then shook hands with the judge.

"This has been long, but it feels good and I think

justice was served today," said Farraj, who says she lost 25 pounds and battled anxiety attacks and other health problems as a result of the stress.

The jury awarded Farraj the value of the lottery ticket after taxes, which was \$3.9 million, plus an equal amount in emotional damages. Jurors decided that defendant Gurinder Ruby committed the theft and Circle K was also liable because Farraj and Ruby were at work when the theft took place.

Ruby's attorney said his client has \$1.6 million left of the nearly \$4 million after-tax winnings he received from the lottery. His bank accounts have been frozen until the money can be transferred to the court and then to Farraj.

Ruby, 33, who chewed gum and appeared stoic during the two-week trial, had little to say as he left the courthouse.

LOTTERY continues on **A6**

LOTTERY • FROM A1

"It's false allegations," said Ruby, of Montclair.

The judge ordered Circle K to pay Farraj the balance of what Ruby could not afford. An attorney representing Circle K argued the emotional damages portion of the award was not legal and hinted that a follow-up claim may be filed.

"We're obviously disappointed, but at this time we will be reviewing our options," said Belynda Reck, an attorney with O'Donnell and Shaeffer.

After about six hours of deliberation, the jury cast unanimous votes on all seven questions posed to them.

"That's rare," said Farraj's attorney, Mark Quigley. "It was my expectation, too, and I'm glad the jury did the right thing."

Quigley said his office will consider whether to ask the District Attorney's Office to file felony grand theft charges against Ruby, which could send him to prison if he is found guilty.

The jury's task in deciding who purchased the \$8 million

SuperLotto ticket came without direct evidence. There were no receipts, and the five minutes during which the ticket was sold had apparently been erased from Circle K's video surveillance.

Lottery officials had computer evidence that the winning ticket was purchased before 4 p.m. Christmas Day, 1999. Time cards showed Farraj was working, but Ruby was not.

Farraj claimed that the next day, she hit an inquiry button on the lottery machine, which told her she had a winning ticket but did not give an amount. She took the ticket to Ruby, who checked the computer, told her she won \$88, paid her in cash from his wallet, then cashed in the \$8 million ticket as his own.

Lottery officials testified there never was an \$88 winner from that draw at the store.

Ruby testified that it was his ticket. After Farraj realized what happened and filed a police report, she and Ruby were put on administrative leave and eventually quit.

Soon after Ruby received a

check from the Lottery Commission, he gave more than \$11,000 to his boss, and sent hundreds of thousands to family and friends in India. He also went to India, from anywhere from 18 days to nine months, attorneys argued.

Farraj, of Upland, said she was humiliated and betrayed by the theft. She had recently immigrated to the United States from Jordan with her parents and eight brothers and sisters.

After she drives to the cemetery to visit her father, who died during the long legal battle, Farraj's focus will turn to finances.

Farraj plans to continue college, study interior design and accounting and invest some of the money.

Her mother, Jawaher Farraj, said Tuesday she was grateful the jury decided in her daughter's favor.

"I thank my God," she said.

Michelle Rester can be reached by e-mail at michelle.rester@sgvn.com or by phone at (626) 962-8811, Ext. 2127.