

## **City of Stamford Settles Police Abuse Lawsuit For \$230,000**

By The Connecticut Law Tribune

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The city of Stamford has agreed to pay \$230,000 to settle a lawsuit by a Norwalk woman who accused a police officer of punching her in an altercation outside a nightclub.

According to the complaint filed in 2009, Sandra Soltis and Brenda Mazariegos were attempting to enter the parking lot of The Palms Nightclub, a downtown Stamford business, when Officer Greg Zach refused to grant her access to the lot. Solits' and Mazariegos' husbands were co-owners of the club and Soltis, who had been driving, reportedly got out of the vehicle to find her husband.

At that point, the lawsuit alleges, Zach demanded to see Mazariegos' driver's license, which she had left at home. When she failed to produce her license, the officer ordered her out of the car, punched her repeatedly in the face and shackled her inside his cruiser, according to the lawsuit.

Eventually, other officers took Mazariegos to the Stamford Hospital Emergency Department, where she was treated for head and facial wounds. The lawsuit alleges that she suffered a "hematoma on her forehead the size of an orange."

A trial resulted in a hung jury last year on some charges while others were dismissed. A second trial was to begin this month.

At the initial trial, Zach testified that when he initially confronted Mazariegos, she walked away. When he grabbed one of her wrists, the officer said, she began to punch and scratch him, The Advocate of Stamford reported. Zach said he punched downward and did not mean to hit her in the face or head and only wanted to stop her from attacking him, the newspaper reported.

"This vicious and unjustified assault is every citizen's worst fear about a police force run amok," said the plaintiff's attorney, Antonio Ponvert III, of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder. Ponvert said his client was only five feet tall, a foot shorter than the officer. "Officer Zach's excessive force against a tiny woman should have landed him in jail," Ponvert said in a prepared statement. "Instead he is back on the job, wearing a uniform and carrying a gun, being paid at taxpayers' expense."

Mazariegos was initially charged with breach of peace, interference with an officer, resisting arrest and assault on a police officer. All those charges were subsequently dropped.

The lawsuit accused the Stamford Police Department of inadequately training its officers and supervisors and failing to terminate Zach as a result of previous incidents and complaints. Zach was disciplined with desk duty over the incident involving Mazariegos, Ponvert said.