

# FORT PIERCE SAM'S CLUB SUIT CLAIMS RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**BYLINE:** Molly Hennessy-Fiske

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

**DATE:** August 24, 2000

**PUBLICATION:** The Palm Beach Post

**EDITION:** MARTIN-ST. LUCIE

**SECTION:** LOCAL

**PAGE:** 2B

Two former employees filed suit against Sam's Club, a subsidiary of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., in federal court Monday alleging racial discrimination. Both women, who are black, maintain employers at the Fort Pierce superstore retaliated against them after they initially complained of discrimination.

From the time Yolanda Singletary was hired in October 1997 and Cleona Culver in May 1998, Culver said management at Sam's Club, 3855 S. U.S. 1, made derogatory racial comments to them, discriminated against them when assigning work duties and continued to harass them after they were forced to resign in spring 1999, according to the suit. Speaking from corporate headquarters in Arkansas Wednesday, Wal-Mart spokesman Tom Williams said he had not received a copy of the suit and could not comment on the allegations. Williams did say Wal-Mart provides managers with general diversity training. Wal-Mart has denied similar allegations at the store leveled in a separate suit set for trial in federal court this fall.

"It wasn't just me, it was black people period. I wasn't the only one, I just wasn't afraid to come forward," Culver, 37, said. "They looked at black people as lower-class people."

With four children to support, the Fort Pierce native said she complained to supervisors - including her manager, who was black. Nothing was done.

"If you go to somebody they just brush it away, under the table . . . They just tell you OK, let it go," she said of the store.

When she was promoted to the marketing department, Culver's assignment to North Fort Pierce was made, a manager said, because she was black, according to the suit. Even after Culver was forced to resign in May 1999, she maintains in the suit that employers made prank calls and surprise visits to her new workplace at BJ's Wholesale Club.

Singletary, 30, of Fort Pierce, once bakery manager at the store, made similar claims.

The women's attorney, **Lance Richard**, also filed suit last summer against Wal-Mart on behalf of Sam's Club employee Curtis Brown. In that suit, scheduled for trial Nov. 6, the cashier maintained that during the two years he worked at the store beginning in 1996 he was the target of racial slurs. Brown, a black man, claims he was passed over for promotions despite exemplary job performance.

An EEOC investigation supported his right to sue, and **Richard** said enough employees complained about the store that EEOC attorneys at one point approached him about broadening the case to include other plaintiffs as a class action.

Wal-Mart filed a response categorically denying Brown's claims in October, holding that he failed to prove discrimination and voluntarily resigned.

"Some of them are good and some of them are bad," Culver said of her former managers, "But they would never fix the problem."

molly\_hennessy\_fiske@pbpost.com