

Barton Health faces lawsuit from former CFO

By Kathryn Reed

Steve Neff, who was the chief financial officer for Barton Health from August 2014-March 2015, has filed a lawsuit against his former employer that is scheduled to go to trial in July.

The lawsuit sites 11 causes of action. They include violation of labor law, fraud, breach of contract, harassment, unlawful termination and defamation.



Steve Neff

“I can give no comment on the case at this time. The allegations in the complaint are public record and the case will be decided based on the evidence presented at trial,” Patricia Kramer with Neasham & Kramer law firm in Folsom told *Lake Tahoe News*. She is representing Neff.

The case will be heard by El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey. There is still a chance for the parties to settle out of court, but at this point those efforts have failed. However, a settlement conference is scheduled for June 23, with the trial slated to start July 17.

“It’s a complex case with a lot of legal issues,” Tom Perry with Kroloff, Belcher, Smart, Perry & Christopherson legal

firm in Stockton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We dispute the allegations in the complaint."

Perry is representing Barton Health and the employees involved.

Before coming to South Lake Tahoe, Neff had been a partner with Renaissance Healthcare Partners in Massachusetts for 17 months. He has been in health care for more than 32 years. He is now running the BrightStar Care home care franchise in Carson City.

Court documents state that Neff had expressed a desire to relocate only if Barton's intent were for him to be with the organization for a number of years.

"During the interview process, Barton representatives Don Whiteside and Clint Purvance also told Neff that the current CEO would soon be retiring, that Purvance, the CMO, had no desire to fill that position and that the CFO position Neff was being recruited for would be the perfect segue for Neff to become CEO of Barton. Purvance told Neff that if he accepts the position, Purvance would personally mentor and groom Neff to fill the position as CEO once [John] Williams left," the lawsuit says.

Five months after Neff's departure it was announced that Purvance would take over as CEO when Williams retired.

The lawsuit talks about how Neff and Purvance were both vying for the top job. Neff is alleging slanderous comments were made about him to hospital board members who would be part of the hiring process, as well as to Whiteside, who is a recruiter.

The lawsuit questions Williams' leadership and accounting methods.

Allegations include Purvance preaching Christianity on

multiple occasions to Neff; Neff made it clear he was Jewish. This relates to the harassment claim. Purvance was Neff's immediate boss and in charge when Williams was gone.

Neff is also fighting for severance pay he claims he is entitled to.

While no dollar amount is requested in the lawsuit, Neff wants compensatory damages, general damages, statutory damages, punitive damages and attorneys' fees.

The suit says the CEO job at Barton that Neff never got was worth \$900,000/year in salary and bonuses. The CFO job came with a three-year contract, an annual base salary of \$285,000, and an incentive plan worth up to 36 percent of that figure.