

# Man accused of sex harassment wins suit

By **Walter Wright**

ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

A man fired because his employer said he sexually harassed a co-worker yesterday won a \$2 million jury verdict on his claim that the company discriminated against him.

The case involved a woman's complaint that the manager created a hostile environment by making familiar remarks and touching her waist and thigh.

At the end of four days of deliberation following an eight-week trial, the Circuit Court jury found that Infiniti-Nissan Motor Sales unlawfully discriminated against its service manager, Leland Gonsalves; broke its promise to keep him on the job; and violated its personnel policies when it fired him in February 1998.

Infiniti-Nissan President Eric Miyasaki said yesterday his company will appeal the verdict, which he said "will have truly dangerous implications for every employer in Hawaii.

"If this decision is allowed to stand, Hawaii employers receiving complaints of harassment will have to choose whether they want to risk liability for ignoring the complaint or risk liability for doing what the sexual harassment law says they must do."

According to court documents, the company said Gonsalves denied touching the woman but admitted that he said the woman resembled a model in a Frederick's of Hollywood calendar he showed her. He also told her "You're my girl," and he once told her to "lift your skirt

above your knee" to get an authorization from another worker, the documents said.

Gonsalves said his supervisors promised him he wouldn't lose his job and also told him he did not need a lawyer.

Gonsalves, 52, said he had to sell his home and turn to yard work after he was fired from the \$3,500-a-month job.

"It was very devastating," Gonsalves said yesterday. "I felt like I was being dragged through the mud, and no matter how many times I tried to rinse it off, it stayed with me."

About half of the damages were for lost wages and benefits, a fraction were for pain and suffering, and \$875,000 was listed as punitive damages, court documents said.