

Fired Marin deputy, acquitted in robbery case, gets retirement settlement

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POSTED: 02/19/2011 08:00:00 PM PST

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A Marin County sheriff's deputy who was fired after being charged in a robbery case — then appealed his termination when he was acquitted by a jury — will retire in June under a settlement with the county.

Stephen George Debrunner, 46, will reach his 20-year service mark in the deal, thus qualifying him for a pension.

"It has always been his law enforcement goal to retire from service after 20 years," said his lawyer, Alison Berry Wilkinson of San Rafael. "I know that he feels very strongly that the department should not have terminated him based on the case that resulted in his acquittal."

Sheriff Robert Doyle said he could not discuss Debrunner's personnel issues because of confidentiality laws.

Debrunner was arrested in March 2009 after an incident at the Costco in Rohnert Park, police said. A store security guard told police he was threatened by a shoplifter who was stealing wine and CDs, said Rohnert Park police Lt. Jeff Taylor.

As the suspect drove out of the parking lot, the security guard took pictures of the vehicle and called police. The license plate was matched to Debrunner's car, and the deputy was arrested after questioning, Taylor said.

The Sonoma County District Attorney's Office charged Debrunner with robbery, criminal threats and reckless driving, said prosecutor William Brockley. Debrunner pleaded not guilty.

Meanwhile, the Marin County Sheriff's Office conducted its own internal investigation and fired Debrunner. Doyle, without commenting on Debrunner's particular case, said deputies who are arrested are required to notify supervisors, who then investigate whether any internal regulations were violated.

Debrunner took his case to trial, and in May he was acquitted on all counts. Berry Wilkinson said the security guard repeatedly changed his story and identified the wrong person as the suspect.

After his acquittal, Debrunner filed an appeal of his termination with the county, and settlement negotiations ensued. Personnel hearings involving sheriff's deputies are closed to the public.

Berry Wilkinson estimated Debrunner's pension at approximately 2.7 percent of his current salary for each year of service. With a final salary of approximately \$80,000 a year, his annual pension would be around \$43,000.

Debrunner, who is a licensed real estate broker with an office in Rohnert Park, declined an interview request through his lawyer. His real estate license was issued in 2005, according to the California Department of Real Estate.

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