

*The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*

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## RACE MOTIVATED FIRINGS AND EPITHETS COST COLORADO CAR DEALERSHIP \$450,000

DENVER - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced today that the federal agency, three individual plaintiffs, and Englewood auto dealer Lithia Centennial Chrysler Plymouth Jeep, Inc. have resolved a lawsuit for nearly half a million dollars alleging that the car dealership terminated three African-American salespersons due to their race.

In its complaint in U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado (Case # 01-D-01119 PAC), the EEOC asserted that on January 15, 1999, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Centennial's General Manager, Michael Janicelli directed manager Thomas Heasty to fire all the black salesmen, using crude racial epithets. On that same day, Heasty fired all three of the African-American salesmen employed at the time.

Such conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment or pregnancy) or national origin and protects employees who complain about such offenses from retaliation. The EEOC filed suit after exhausting its conciliation efforts to reach a voluntary pre-litigation settlement. At the time of these events, the dealership was part of the Moreland Automotive Group and was in the process of being acquired by Lithia.

The dealership has agreed to pay \$450,000 in damages to the three terminated employees. The private attorney for the three employees, Charlotte Sweeney of the law firm of LaFond & Sweeney, PC, indicates that the settlement will be split equally among the three. In addition to the monetary settlement, Lithia has agreed to continue providing training to its Colorado managers to ensure compliance with federal laws prohibiting workplace discrimination. Doug Moreland, the previous owner of the dealership which is now Lithia Centennial Chrysler, has also agreed that dealerships in which he has a controlling interest will be under continued monitoring by the EEOC, and that managers will be provided EEO training.

Joseph H. Mitchell, Regional Attorney for the EEOC's Denver District Office, which handled the litigation, said: "The EEOC is pleased with this settlement. In addition to providing the victims with substantial monetary relief, this agreement will make lasting changes at Lithia Centennial Chrysler through training by the employer and monitoring by the EEOC."

In addition to enforcing Title VII, the EEOC enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which protects workers age 40 and older from discrimination based on age; the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits gender-based wage discrimination; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits

employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the federal sector; Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments; and sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Further information about the Commission is available on the agency's web site at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov).

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