

UNIONDALE /

Damages Awarded to Worker

A federal district court jury in Uniondale has found that a Nassau County worker was fired, at least in part, because of her age and has awarded the 53-year-old woman a total of \$47,000.

Paula Haugen, who worked as a child support investigator on a six-month trial basis, was hired by the Nassau Department of Social Services in July, 1995, when she was 50, along with four others who were in their early 30s or younger. Haugen lost her post six months later, after turning 51, while the others moved into permanent slots.

Haugen was hired on a Friday, she said, and the next Monday her supervisor wrote a negative memo about her which was purported to be written "after several days of training."

Haugen complained of bias that fall, to no avail. "What made this egregious is nobody bothered to investigate," said her lawyer, Enza M. Brandi of Garden City.

Haugen called it a victory for older workers. "Older workers may not be the fastest," she said, "but they have knowledge you can't buy." Jurors awarded Haugen \$32,000 under the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and \$15,000 under the state human rights law.

Chief Deputy County Attorney Richard Leffer declined to comment before reviewing the transcripts, adding that the county might appeal.

— Goldhaber