Judge Tosses Sex Abuse Claim Against Goguen

Whitefish philanthropist has long denied allegations in woman’s 2016 lawsuit

By TRISTAN SCOTT of the Beacon

 A California judge has dismissed a lawsuit alleging sexual abuse against Michael Goguen, a prominent venture capitalist and philanthropist whose local contributions include The Whitefish Trail and the Two Bear Air search and rescue program.

 In a lengthy Sept. 12 order terminating the sanctions against Goguen, retired Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Read Ambler, who is serving as arbitrator in the case, wrote that the plaintiff, Amber Laureal Baptiste, failed to undergo medical examinations and produce other documents necessary in the discovery process, leading to the case’s termination.

“While Baptiste is free to believe what she wants to believe, the orders are binding on Baptiste, and her failure to comply with the orders is unacceptable,” Ambler wrote. “The referee had given Baptiste numerous opportunities, despite her failures to comply with the orders, to rectify her failures to provide discovery or to establish her inability to proceed with the litigation. Unfortunately, Baptiste has done neither, and the record presented does not support a conclusion that Baptiste will do so in the future.”

Attorneys representing Baptiste in March 2016 claimed Goguen abused Baptiste sexually, physically and emotionally after the pair developed a relationship in 2001, the complaint states.

After Baptiste retained an attorney in 2013 and threatened a lawsuit, Goguen signed a contract to pay Baptiste $40 million “as compensation for the horrors she suffered at his hands,” the now-dismissed 2016 complaint states.

According to the lawsuit, Goguen paid Baptiste $10 million on May 30, 2014 but later refused to pay the remaining $30 million. In December 2014, Goguen sent a letter to Baptiste rescinding the contract and claiming the agreement was null and void because it was procured under extortion, court records state.

Following Baptiste’s lawsuit, Sequoia Capital, the venture capital firm in Menlo Park, California, where Goguen served as a managing partner since 1996, announced the part-time Whitefish resident was no longer with the firm.

In response to Baptiste’s claim, Goguen filed a countersuit in California, claiming he was the victim of extortion and denying allegations of sexual and physical abuse.

The 41-page cross-complaint, filed in San Mateo County Superior Court, states Goguen carried on a consensual sexual relationship with Baptiste for over a decade while he was married to other women.

Attorneys for Goguen say Baptiste wanted him to make a greater commitment to her and became “consumed by anger, obsession and jealousy” after the relationship ended in 2013. Baptiste “concluded that if she could not have Mr. Goguen’s heart, at least she could have his money,” the attorneys state.

Goguen’s attorney, Diane Doolittle, said he would continue to pursue the counterclaims against Baptiste.

In 2018, Baptiste’s legal counsel with the Sherman Law Group filed a motion to be relieved from the case, citing “irreconcilable differences and a breakdown in communication.”

According to a statement, Doolittle said Baptiste’s claims lacked merit from the beginning.

“Amber Laurel Baptiste’s sensationalized lawsuit against Silicon Valley venture capitalist Michael Goguen collapsed under the weight of its own falsehood yesterday, when a judge dismissed the case because of Baptiste’s repeated, egregious and willful misconduct. Over the course of this case, Baptiste perjured herself, concealed, destroyed and falsified key evidence, and demonstrated her contempt for the legal system by systematically violating numerous court orders.”

According to a statement from Goguen: “I wouldn’t wish what happened to my family and I on anyone. But, I'm a big believer that ‘everything happens for a reason’ and that extreme lows can be the pre-cursor to higher highs,” he wrote. “If that shocking blowup hadn’t happened to me in March of 2016 I’d still be in my long unwinding process from Sequoia after hitting the 20-year mark. Instead I’ve had the last three years to focus on connecting with the community I love, maximizing my philanthropic impact, strengthening the bonds with my family and friends, and of course, starting the next great venture capital firm, Two Bear Capital.”

Goguen built a home along Whitefish Lake over a decade ago and has become a well-known philanthropist in the community. He donated a large land easement and spent over $10 million in personal funds on an expansive state trust land plan that transformed into the popular Whitefish Trail. He has invested untold millions more into an assortment of local causes and community investments, as well as business ventures, including Casey’s Bar and PROOF Research.

His contributions include Two Bear Air, a search and rescue resource and aviation program that includes two helicopters that serve the Pacific Northwest. Goguen has invested over $11 million in the program and covers all of its operating costs.

In 2014, Goguen donated $2 million over five years to the state’s Internet Crimes Against Children task force in an effort to protect kids from online predators.

 tscott@flatheadbeacon.com