

First Community Bank settles case with Missouri Ledge

BY STEVE VOCKRODT | STAFF WRITER

First Community Bank has settled with an Oak Grove company that claimed the Lee's Summit bank pulled the plug on its financing halfway through a business relocation.

A Jackson County Circuit judge on April 27 approved a settlement agreement that has First Community Bank paying \$5.2 million to the owners of Missouri Ledge LLC, an Oak Grove stone-cutting company.

Missouri Ledge owners Tim and Deborah Crede sued First Community Bank in 2009, seeking \$8 million. They claimed that when they got about 80 percent of the way through relocating their Oak Grove company to a larger facility in Lexington, the bank stopped financing the move.

The lawsuit named the bank, CEO Jack Fields and bank employee Don Knehans as defendants.

It claimed that Fields and Knehans visited the Credes at their Oak Grove business location to encourage them to move their banking business to First Community Bank.

The Credes sought financing from First Community Bank for an expansion to a Lexington facility and were told by Knehans to secure a purchase contract for it and represented that the bank would cover the contract and other relocation costs.

That's despite email evidence uncovered by the Credes that showed in the day following their initial meeting in Oak Grove, Fields told Knehans that the bank should tell the Credes that they should find a backup bank.

In a deposition, Fields acknowledged that he never communicated to the Credes that they should find a backup bank for their financing.

John M. Edgar of The Edgar Law Firm LLC represented the Credes. He said the bank extended about \$250,000 to his client before deciding it wouldn't lend any more.



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Kent Sullivan, a Stinson Morrison Hecker LLP lawyer representing First Community Bank, said the bank denied any wrongdoing but settled to avoid continued litigation.

The settlement document, however, maintains that the bank denies the Credes' substantive allegations.

The Credes entered bankruptcy in 2010 but continue to run the company.

"This money will permit him to restore his operation," Edgar said. "He never went out of business completely."