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Pacifica woman wins lawsuit, keeps house after being conned

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REDWOOD CITY -- An 89-year-old Pacifica woman who was conned out of \$600,000 by a contractor and faced foreclosure has won a lawsuit that prevents her eviction, an attorney said.

As part of the settlement worked out Thursday in San Mateo County Superior Court, the lien on Pauline Reade's house was lifted and she won't have to repay a \$420,000 loan that had been taken out on her property without her knowledge, said the woman's attorney, Niki Okcu, who took the case pro bono.

Reade also won some compensation, though Okcu declined to provide details, saying the settlement was confidential.

Reade sued Fetuu Tupoufutuna, a handyman who became her caretaker, as well as Deutsche Bank National Trust Co. and GMAC Mortgage, after she learned her home was going to be auctioned to repay a loan of which she had no knowledge.

She later learned that Tupoufutuna had tricked her into signing the loan papers by telling her he needed her signature to get a permit to repair a backyard shed, attorneys said. Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems Inc., Executive Trustee

Services, Paul Financial, Fetuu Tupoufutuna, RBS Financial Products Inc. and Mohammed Ali George were also named as defendants.

Okcu said Reade met Tupoufutuna sometime before 2006 when he was circulating in her neighborhood offering handyman services. He did some work on her house and then began to get involved in her finances. Reade is a widow, has no children and no family

in the area.

Tupoufutuna took out what was initially a \$312,000 home equity loan on Reade's home in September 2006, attorneys said. He made some payments, but eventually stopped reimbursing the bank, attorneys said.

During the same time, he had also stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars from the woman, Okcu said. Reade's first knowledge of the loan came in March 2009, when she got a letter saying that her home was to be sold at public auction.

Reade told a neighbor what had happened and then the police. Okcu and Hope Nakamura of the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County filed suit to stop the foreclosure in April.

San Mateo County prosecutors in March filed criminal charges against Tupoufutuna, but he is believed to have fled the country, Okcu said.

"She is in her house," Okcu said. "Hopefully, she will be able to pick up the pieces of her life and move on."

Contact Joshua Melvin at 650-348-4335.

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