

Glen Ridge jitney driver cleared of harassment

BY NIC CORBETT
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

A harassment charge against a popular Glen Ridge jitney driver was dismissed yesterday in a West Orange courtroom amid allegations of racism.

Roy Campbell, 63, worked as a jitney driver for five years, driving residents at no charge around the 1.3-square-mile affluent community. In early March, he was accused of inappropriately touching a 53-year-old female passenger. A borough police officer at the Glen Ridge train station that day reported seeing Campbell greet the woman by grasping her forearms.

But Campbell knew the woman beyond giving her rides around town. Two days earlier, he helped her out by having a disabled car towed from the front of her home, said Campbell's attorney, Timothy R. Smith.

"I did a favor for her," Campbell said. "She did a favor for me. And I got off the bus to thank her.

To me, I think the police overreacted to the whole situation."

Campbell's attorney suggested the case was an act of racial discrimination. Campbell is black, and the officer who filed the report is white.

"It's more akin to something out of Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1950s than to a town in Essex County in the new millennium," Smith said. "If it was a wealthy, white guy in a suit that had greeted this woman in the way it was allegedly done, he would not have been arrested."

Glen Ridge Police Chief John R. Magnier dismissed this notion: "There is absolutely no racism involved in this whatsoever. The investigation was done fairly."

The officer, a rookie named Michelle Provenzano, wrote in a report that she was facing the woman's back, but still from her point of view it appeared Campbell was "way too close."

"I immediately ran to where they stood and told

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DAVID GARD/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Roy Campbell, right, a Glen Ridge jitney driver accused of inappropriate touching, stands with his attorney, Timothy Smith, in a West Orange courtroom. The charge was dismissed yesterday.

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Roy to be on with his business and to let the woman go," Provenzano said.

Campbell was startled to see the officer and jumped back, according to the report, and the woman, who seemed "visibly shaken," said: "Yes, please get him away. Thank you."

The woman, according to Provenzano's report, thanked the officer for intervening and said Campbell had tried something

similar before.

Because the jitney service is run by Glen Ridge, trying the case in the borough would have presented a conflict of interest, Smith said. So the case was sent to West Orange municipal court.

Yesterday, both parties — a West Orange prosecutor and Campbell's defense attorney — agreed to drop the harassment charge on a few conditions: that Campbell stipulate police had probable cause to bring the complaint, that Campbell apologize for any misunderstanding and that there be no contact between Campbell and the woman beyond

her use of the jitney.

"I'm glad that justice has worked," the woman said before leaving the courtroom yesterday.

A few of Campbell's passengers accompanied him to the courthouse to act as character witnesses, but the scheduled trial was canceled after the agreement was reached.

Campbell was suspended without pay about a week after the incident. Now that the charge has been dismissed, Campbell intends to get his old job back. But he doesn't plan to take any legal action against the police department, his lawyer said.

If Campbell is guilty of anything, his passengers say, it's caring too much.

Ruth Trance, 38, of Montclair, said Campbell once helped clear out her storage. She thinks the jitney service has suffered without Campbell.

"All the ladies, they all ask me, 'How's Roy? How's his case? Is it going to be dismissed? Is he going to be back for the jitney?'" said Trance, who's used the jitney for seven years. "That's all you hear."

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