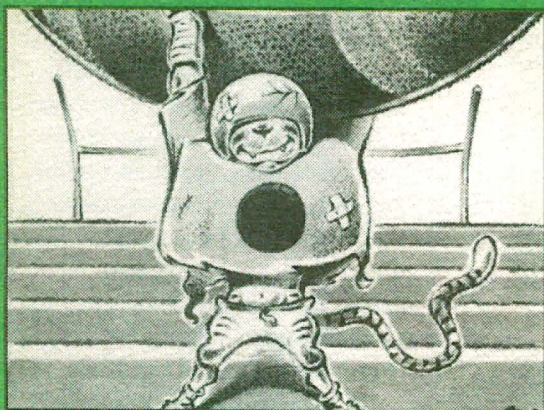


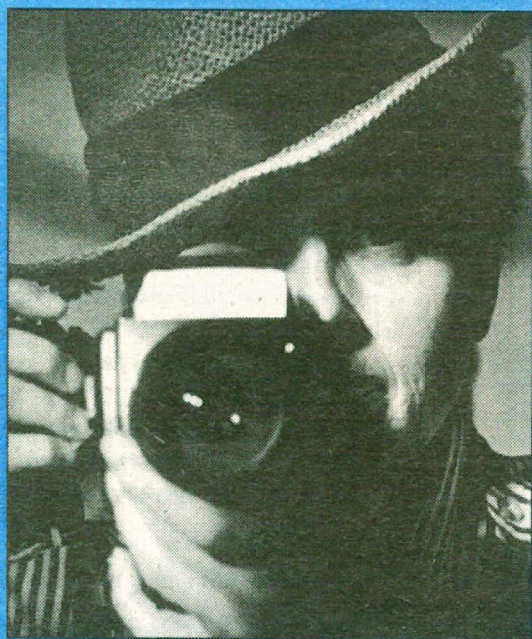
**Backbeat: The
dogged determination
of Suzi Katz**

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**Bill Gallo finds that
winning isn't everything
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**US West dials "D"
for discrimination
and gets a costly
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**Snap judgments:
Meet the
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the mug out of
mug shots.
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THE SECRET STORY OF THE ROCKY FLATS GRAND JURY

BY BRYAN ABAS



Collect call:
Laurie Fitzgerald
won a \$2.3 million
judgment against
US West.

To Hell With Sympathy

US West's sensitivity-training class turns heartless.

By Brian Gaffney

US West Communications, Inc. achieved the remarkable last week. A federal jury nailed the company for discriminating against a white female consultant and her black male associate—and it found that the discrimination occurred during a training program for teachers of "pluralism workshops."

The "Leading a Diverse Workplace" program, a Sixties-style sensitivity-training seminar, was adopted by US West to heighten its employees' awareness of discrimination. The program is intended to prevent exactly what the jury said happened to Denver consultant Laurie Fitzgerald, who is white, and her black Seattle-based colleague, Aaron Hazard.

In addition to awarding Fitzgerald and Hazard \$1.35 million in compensatory damages, the jury slapped US West with \$1 million in punitive damages. Kathryn Miller, Fitzgerald's attorney, says the cool million was punishment for what she called the "corporate arrogance" of US West.

Where did a company ostensibly trying to do the right thing go so wrong? The story begins in April 1989, when US West held a five-day seminar in Lakewood for people with experience in pluralism training who might be interested in teaching the "Leading a Diverse Workplace" program to US West employees nationwide.

Fitzgerald and Hazard were invited to the workshop, which was directed by two outside consultants and a black US West employee named Debra Sapp. Fitzgerald and Hazard say that Sapp told them and the approximately twenty other trainees that she controlled who got the training contracts and who did not.

On the first day of the workshop, the trainees were asked to relate a personal tale that showed why they were committed to spreading the gospel of pluralism. "The stories were very emotional. They were poignant," Fitzgerald remembers. Tale after teary tale of racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination filled the room.

Then came Fitzgerald's turn. "I shared a story about being involved in a long-term romantic relationship with a black man," she says. "I told about the pressure we had received in our relationship from the black community. It eventually caused the relation to collapse."

As Fitzgerald recounted the breakup she grew emotional—so emotional that Hazard came across the room, offered his handkerchief and embraced her. But Sapp, for one, did not appear to be touched, Fitzgerald and Hazard say.

"I did not notice her until Aaron came to me and put his arms around

me," Fitzgerald says. "I looked across his shoulder and she was sitting there. If looks could kill, I would be dead."

It was obvious to Fitzgerald that Sapp did not approve of her liaison with a black man. And the fact that she was being consoled by Hazard—who is also black—apparently made matters worse. "To her it was like spitting in her face," says Fitzgerald.

In court Sapp and US West denied all the allegations made by Fitzgerald and Hazard. US West continues to do so. Spokesman Dick MacKnight of US West has not yet decided whether to file an appeal. "We support our employees, and we take the position that US West has done nothing wrong," he says.

Sapp, who continues to work for the company, could not be reached for comment.

After Fitzgerald told the group about her relationship, she says, Sapp created a "punitive environment" for her. Fitzgerald claims that Sapp turned against her and that the others in the seminar, eager to align themselves with the person in charge of awarding the contracts, followed suit—with relish.

"It was a feeding frenzy of those who wanted to align themselves with her to get the work and to punish me in some way," says Fitzgerald. "It became a group dynamic. People accused me of being sexist, racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, insensitive—anything you can imagine."

One example: During the week the group debated what to call a person with an Hispanic surname. Someone suggested that "Hispanic" would be offensive to some people and suggested "Latino" instead. Fitzgerald then chimed in: "I said I don't know if that's kosher, because it's a masculine noun, so you get into the sexism issue."

Big mistake. The group came down hard on Fitzgerald for using the word "kosher," accusing her of being anti-Semitic.

On the fourth day of the program, Fitzgerald met with Sapp and, she says, the seminar director gave her more than an earful. According to Fitzgerald's testimony, Sapp said, "You white bitches are always trying to take all the airtime, and I'm sick of it."

The next day she booted Fitzgerald out of the program. "She said to me, 'I want you out of here. Give me back your materials. We're not going to use you,'" Fitzgerald recalls. "When I asked her why, she said, 'You blew it

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Off Limits

Last but not least: Former Denver police chief **Jim Collier** didn't waste any time making his getaway. Less than 24 hours after he announced he was resigning as Denver's top cop and accepting a captain's post and pay so that he and his family could return to their beloved Littleton home, his tenant started packing up and moving out. The timing was convenient—very. It was reported that Collier told Mayor **Wellington Webb** he was moving out of the city no matter what—even if it meant moving out of the chief's office, too—in part because the lease was up on his Littleton digs. In fact, no such lease existed. A family friend had been tending the Littleton house on the understanding that she would vacate whenever the Colliers were ready to return to the home they'd owned for 22 years. Still, the former chief says it was strictly coincidence that his family was ready to move back home during the most tension-packed portion of his reign, just one week after disgruntled officers called for a 'no confidence' vote against him.

The force is no longer with him, but fond memories remain. The day after Collier stepped down, two officers were overheard discussing his departure. "I loved the guy," said one. "I like French-kissing rattlesnakes, too."

Sweetening the plot: In a real blow for truth in advertising, the Sheridan-Heritage Building across from Union Station has been renamed Streetcar Stables—which helps explain the lingering odor of horse urine that clings to the building. Plans for the historic structure's renovation into lofts and retail space include a hefty amount to remove the smell (and the floor), but in the meantime developers are taking drastic measures to clear the air. Before last Thursday's open house to hype the lofts, they installed a generator and fanned wintergreen spray through the building and out into the streets, turning LoDo into BlowDo for the evening.

Looks like *Rocky Mountain News* reporter **Kevin Flynn** will blow lunch if he sees "LoDo" in print one more time. "Please can we NOT use the term 'LoDo' in our news columns when we are referring to lower downtown?" he begged in the paper's electronic newsroom newsletter. "It is just an awful, awful thing coined by a nightlife columnist over at the two-bit paper, the Pest." After other *News* writers rallied to the nickname's defense, Flynn fired back: "I know I risk being run over by a BMW or Cherokee Laredo for saying this, but shouldn't reader comprehension be among our top goals? When Lodo is as widely accepted and known by homeowners in Golden and Parker as it is among self-promoters in lower downtown, then we should use it. In the meantime, we should do our best to stamp it out. Until that day, 'Die, Yuppie Scum!'"

The *News* is really yip with people these days. The front page of the Friday, September 11, edition was remade to feature the ground-breaking of Up With People international headquarters in Broomfield, leaving only a corner of the cover for the big news of the day: the indictment of former Silverado chairman **Michael Wise**. But then, smiling in the background of the four-color photograph along with the other Up-and-comers was none other than *News* publisher **Larry Strutton**.

Dirk's Excellent Adventures

Cleaning up crime on the
Greenbelt has its rewards.

By Robin Chotzinoff

Dirk Coleman went to the Wheat Ridge police academy, but only for twelve weeks. And not to shoot a gun as much as to shoot the breeze. "I love the public contact part," he says of his job. "I like to work my jaw muscles."

The five Wheat Ridge Animal Park Enforcement Officers (APEOs) get to do that. They get to wear shorts to work, too. They even get to ride mountain bikes on the job. When they're not rounding up stray dogs all over town, their territory is the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, a five-mile stretch of river pathway as bucolic as they come.

"It's hard to believe it's a job," the 33-year-old Coleman says. "It's so excellent."

Nice work if you can get it, but you probably can't.

"We had 160 applications the last time we hired someone," says Nick Fisher, who supervises Coleman and his three fellow APEOs. "We get all kinds of people. Ex-police officers. Animal control people. People are attracted by the fact that, in essence, we do three different jobs: animal stuff, wildlife stuff and the greenbelts and parks. It's an unusual arrangement."

The unusual arrangement came together in 1987, when Wheat Ridge city officials ran out of money to employ park rangers and decided to combine their duties with those of animal control officers. Thus were born the APEOs, who spend half their time handling animal complaints and the other half cruising the greenbelt by bike, truck or—Coleman's favorite—all-terrain vehicle. "It can go anywhere," Coleman enthuses of the ATV. "You can cruise right over Clear Creek on it. Nick [Fisher] once dropped it right into a five-foot hole in the river, and it still kept running. The ATV is excellent. The whole department is excellent."

But only excellent applicants can handle the variety of situations in which APEOs find themselves. "During the hiring process, we ask a lot of questions," Fisher explains. "An animal control question



Dirk at work:
Dirk Coleman
can't believe
he gets paid
to do this.

might be: Let's say you go to a house on an anonymous complaint of a dog being mistreated, and the owner won't let you look at the dog. What do you do? A parks question might be: Let's say someone has reserved Field Park for a party, but a bunch of truckers are sitting down there drinking beer and they don't want to leave. What do you do?"

Dirk Coleman would know. His life has been ideal preparation for kinder, gentler police work. A fourth-generation Coloradan, he decided against the police academy after high school in deference to his mother, who thought law enforcement was too dangerous. Apparently she wasn't afraid of heights, though, because Coleman became a glazier, "working 52 stories up." Whenever he came down to earth, Coleman volunteered with his local fire department, but he longed for a chance to serve and protect fulltime.

Four years ago he made it through the Wheat Ridge academy's battery of tests and interviews, and landed on the greenbelt. After a few months on horseback, he made the switch to wheeled vehicles, putting in anywhere from 25 to 70 miles a day. Unlike Wheat Ridge's regular police officers, he is expected to fight criminals without a gun. "But we carry batons and that cayenne pepper Mace," he says. "And I've never had to use either of them. Well, I spray the Mace on my salad...But seriously, all you really need is a stern voice. And that's all I do. I never even cuss."

That makes his language cleaner than some of the recreation taking place along the greenbelt. "At lunch hour in these parks, or early in the morning, you see all kinds of rendezvous going on," he says. "As long as they don't get indecent, I have no judgment to make. I got two guys performing homoerotic acts the other day, but I only got on their case because it was indecent. I told them, 'This has nothing to do with sexual preference. I'm not here to harass you.'"

Leave the harassment to the sporting types. "One of our mountain bikers hit a deer this summer," Coleman recalls. "And we've seen Rollerbladers out of control. Just the other day, this gal is zooming by, she has no idea how to stop and she's going, 'Help me! Help me!'"

Coleman did, just as he assists overzealous exercisers and would-be Huck Finns. He's even helpful when cracking down on lawbreakers.

"Watch this," he says, approaching two people walking a loose collie in flagrant violation of Wheat Ridge's strict leash ordinances. "I lift [weights] six days a week, and because of my physical looks and that, I don't have to say anything intimidating."

Pulling his truck level with the scofflaws, Coleman gently issues a friendly reminder about the leash law, and the shamed pet owner complies. "See, he knew, but he just forgot," Coleman says. "He won't forget again."

"And that," he proclaims, "is excellent." ■

US West

Continued from page 8
on the first day."

MackKnight again denied the charges in general, but refused to comment on specific allegations made by Fitzgerald. "That would be trying the case again in the papers, and we have no intention of doing that," he said.

While US West decided it did not need Fitzgerald's services, Hazard was offered work—as long as he agreed to certain conditions, he says. "She told me, 'You're a sharp, young, intelligent brother. If you divorce yourself from Laurie, I'll get you work at US West, and I'll get you other work in Denver as well,'" Hazard says. He refused to disassociate himself with Fitzgerald, and never received any training contracts from US West.

In court papers, US West admitted Hazard did not receive any training contracts because of his continued association with Fitzgerald. But the company contended that it did not illegally discriminate against Fitzgerald, and therefore did not discriminate against Hazard, either.

The jury deliberated less than four hours before finding US West discriminated against Fitzgerald and Hazard, wrongfully depriving them of the opportunity to participate in the company's four-year training program. Attorney Miller says Fitzgerald and Hazard missed out on teaching more than eighteen workshops a year at \$4,500 a pop.

Fitzgerald was awarded \$790,000 and Hazard \$506,000 in compensatory damages, which included \$250,000 for pain and suffering for each. In addition, US West was assessed \$1,000,000 in punitive damages. Attorney Miller says the company was hit hard for its arrogance. "They say: 'We do diversity training. Therefore, how can we be accused of discriminating against people?'" she asserts.

That all this took place in a program designed to help people recognize and come to terms with their prejudices proves that US West isn't committed to curtailing prejudice, Fitzgerald says: "What it really was was political correctness disguised as diversity training."

And what of the trainees who graduated from the seminar and went on to conduct diversity training classes for all of US West's employees?

"I don't think they're fit to be doing this," says Fitzgerald. "Any of them. There were people in the room who did not have the courage to come forward, for whatever reason. Now they're all out there training all these US West people. It's mind-boggling and it's repulsive." ■

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