

Bristow veterinarian awarded \$6.5 million over TV report

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BRISTOW — A longtime Bristow veterinarian who claimed he was defamed by a Oklahoma City television station was awarded \$6.5 million in damages by a Creek County jury Wednesday, his attorney said.

The panel returned actual damages of \$6 million against defendants Griffin Television and former KWTW, channel 9, reporter Chris Halsne, said Doug Stall, an attorney who represents veterinarian Howard Mitchell.

Halsne in 1998 did a series of investigative reports linking Mitchell to the "doping" of a racehorse and show horse, the attorney said.

"What the essence of it was, they labeled him a horse killer," said Stall. "He had a nationwide reputation for treating high-profile racehorses."

The jury also returned punitive damages of \$250,000 each against Halsne and Griffin Tele-

vision, which owns KWTW. Griffin Television also owns KOTV, channel 6, in Tulsa. Halsne now works for a television station in Seattle, said Robert D. Nelon, an attorney who represents Griffin.

Nelon said that while he was disappointed in the verdict, he was confident that an appellate court would reverse the decision.

Stories broadcast by KWTW claimed there was a connection between the doping of a high-price racehorse and the doping of a show horse in Oklahoma City named This Lady Sings, court documents show.

Other segments claimed that Mitchell was "suspected of killing" and "accused of helping kill one of this country's top racehorses," documents indicate.

The allegations centered on This Lady Sings, whom he treated in November 1997 at the American Quarter Horse Association World Championships in Oklahoma City, and Doo Dominate, a mare he treated

prior to the 1994 All American Futurity at Ruidoso Downs in New Mexico.

This Lady Sings was later sold to Ron Skoda, who claimed in a 1998 lawsuit against former owner T.J. Offutt that Mitchell had "blocked" the mare with a painkiller prior to the world championship to mask her lameness, documents claim.

Two days after Mitchell treated Doo Dominate, the horse broke down yards from the finish line in the Futurity and was destroyed, records show. Two other horses went down at the track that day, including one during the same race, Stall said.

For failing to disclose that his occupational license had been revoked by the New Mexico Horse Racing Commission, the Oklahoma Veterinary Board in 1998 concluded that Mitchell had engaged in fraud or misrepresentation in applying for his veterinary license and placed him on probation for two years.

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