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PERSONAL FINANCE

Silicon Valley firm sued over Scientology issue

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA - Former employees of Applied Materials have filed suit alleging that the Silicon Valley manufacturing firm forced them to undergo Church of Scientology seminars.

Trial proceedings began Tuesday as lawyers for both sides argued motions before Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Frank Cliff.

In their suit, former employees Steven Hunziker, Virginia Sanders and Kate Schuchmann allege that Applied Materials hired an outside firm to teach workers communication and time-management skills.

But the seminar firm, Applied Scholastics of Fremont, was really a recruitment arm of the Church of Scientology, a religious group that has been ac-

cused of financially exploiting followers and ruthlessly attacking critics, the lawsuit says.

When they refused to take the courses, the former employees claim, they were driven out of the company. They also allege that the seminars violated their religious freedom. The central issue in the case is whether the firm retaliated against the employees after they refused to take part.

Applied Materials has denied the charges, saying it was not aware that the seminars had any link to Scientology. The classes were dropped in October 1988 after workers complained.

Lawyers for Applied Materials have asked that any reference to Scientology be excluded from the trial. But lawyers for the former employees said Scientology is at the heart of the lawsuit.

Two sides of Scientology

Church members describe Scientology as a non-denominational religion that draws on the writings of founder and science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard. Critics say the church targets emotionally vulnerable people with high-pressure recruiting tactics and pseudo-scientific programs for self-improvement.

Lawyers for Applied Materials acknowledge that materials clearly stated that the seminars were based on the writings of the late Scientology founder, L. Ron Hubbard, but they say the management didn't know the seminar was Scientology related.

Applied Scholastics maintains that it uses Hubbard's educational teachings, not his religious philosophy.