

WELLS FARGO SUED BY FORMER BRANCH MANAGER



Mark Stroud, ex-manager of the Bluffton Wells Fargo branch, is taking legal action against the bank. He claims that his termination was a repercussion for notifying the company of a higher up's usage of cocaine and sexual harassment, according to The Beaufort Gazette. Stroud, along with eight other branch workers, was axed in July by the same bank administrator, Scott Zardenetta. Stroud told this to the bank's HR representative as it violated the business's code of ethics. Stroud said he was involved in no wrongdoings in line with Wells Fargo policies and was unjustly fired. "The aforesaid termination was conducted in retaliation for the complaint made to HR by Stroud concerning Scott's conduct and sexual harassment of certain Wells Fargo employees," the lawsuit alleges. Seven of the nine workers also filed legal action with similar claims. Both suits are being managed by John Bowen of Laughlin & Bowen, located on Hilton Head Island. Stroud issued a grievance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission at the end of summer and got a "notice of right to sue" from that entity in November. He issued legal action on November 19. Stroud is in search for lost pay (presently and in the future), future damages including repayment for emotional pain and injury. The defendants of Wells Fargo are district manager Scott Zardenetta and investigator Mark Owens in both cases. Wells Fargo is not yet in receipt of the lawsuit. Stroud supposedly heard about Zardenetta taking part in drugs and "inappropriate sexual relations" with workers at Sea Pines branch on Hilton Head earlier this year. He got wind of this from Wendy Baxley, who was also employed at the Bluffton branch. Stroud wanted Baxley to report the information to HR, but never followed through. Baxley and her significant other ended up friends with Zardenetta, as they became frequent partiers at "gentlemen's clubs" until the next morning. The suit also states that during a golf tournament in April, Baxley relayed a text message to Stroud and other workers at Bluffton that was originally sent from Zardenetta. The message stated that he and Baxley's boyfriend (a worker at the Sea Pines branch) should all engage in sexual intercourse. Zardenetta also wanted Baxley's companion to invite another female worker from Sea Pines to engage in such activities. Baxley was promoted and is now the manager at Okatie's Wells Fargo. Zardenetta is away on medical leave. Stroud relayed the episodes to Wells Fargo's HR division including the names of all who were a part of the situation. Stroud assumed confidentiality, but HR notified Zardenetta who originally issued the grievance. Stroud was put on admin leave in the middle of July and was cut loose by Zardenetta a day later.