

Court fight becomes physical

Literally combative lawyers come to blows over papers

By Tom Andersen

Staff Writer

A brawl between opposing lawyers erupted in the Westchester County Courthouse yesterday after a hearing to determine whether suspended White Plains lawyer Doris Sassower should be held in contempt of court.

Sassower and her daughter, Elena, scuffled with lawyer Joel Aurnou in courtroom 1000 after they saw Aurnou taking documents that he had presented as exhibits at the hearing.



Doris Sassower

When Aurnou refused to relinquish the documents, Doris Sassower, 59, ran to his table and tried to grab other documents of his. Aurnou held her off, but Elena Sassower succeeded in taking a handful of his documents and retreating to a corner.

Aurnou pursued her, and during the ensuing scuffle he fell to the floor and his eyeglasses were knocked off. Elena Sassower then stepped on the glasses and crushed them into the carpet with her foot.

"I've never had a scene like that in 30-odd years," said the 58-year-old Aurnou, a former County Court judge. "It was just appalling."

No court officers were in the room. Several men and Aurnou's wife tried to separate the combatants. But the brawl escalated.

Aurnou and Elena Sassower were knocked to the floor separately as Aurnou tried to retrieve his documents. Aurnou raised his hand at least once as if to strike Elena Sassower, and later she emerged from a scuffle screaming, "He hit me!"

Lt. Michael Flaherty of the Westchester County police said no charges were filed.

Aurnou said he suffered three cuts on his face. He also lost his hearing aid, he said. Elena Sassower said her leg and her mother's jaw were bruised.

Before the fight, state Supreme Court Judge Nicholas Colabella had adjourned Sassower's contempt hearing until Tuesday.

Colabella had threatened to fine or jail her because she would not sign papers promising not to countersue former client Kathleen C. Wolstencroft or Aurnou.

Aurnou had represented Wolstencroft in a trial against Sassower last year. The trial ended with Sassower agreeing to pay \$700,000 and to sign papers promising not to sue.

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