

UNION CITY

Jury awards ex-cop \$270G in 'politics' suit

By **MICHAELANGELO CONTE**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

UNION CITY — A Superior Court jury has awarded \$270,000 to a former police detective who filed a civil suit alleging that he was busted down to patrolman because he supported a political opponent of Mayor Brian Stack.

The verdict in favor of Raymond Lopez was returned Wednesday afternoon, after just three hours of deliberation.

"When you have the truth on your side you can never lose," said Lopez, who also had served as a city commissioner.

"Everything I've done for the city I've done the right way, and I served the community well as an officer and as commissioner," he said.

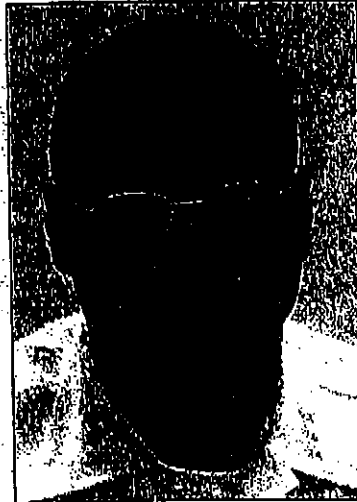
"The jury has spoken and they spoke for a reason and with a purpose," he said. "They are protecting the citizens against acts of discrimination and police are not second-class citizens. Rights apply to us also."

Lopez's attorney, Ty Hyderally, said the verdict is proof that "politics does not have to invade every facet of a municipal employee's life."

He said he will now file to have his client's legal fees and other costs reimbursed, which could cost the city about \$100,000.

Lopez, who was hired as a police officer in 1981, served as a detective in the juvenile bureau from 1986 to 2003 and as a city commissioner from 1998 to 2002, Hyderally said. He also was a supporter of former Mayor Rudy Garcia, who resigned from office in 2000.

Stack was appointed mayor to finish Garcia's term and he was elected outright in 2002. Under the city's commission form of government, Stack is di-



CHIEF CHARLES EVERETT NAMED IN SUIT

rector of the city's Public Safety Department, and in that capacity he appointed Charles Everett police chief on Oct. 16, 2003. Numerous Stack supporters in the Police Department also were promoted that day, Hyderally said.

That same day, Hyderally said, Lopez was demoted from detective to patrolman, even though he had a spotless record and had taken only four sick days in his two decades on the force.

After being reassigned to patrolman status, Lopez resigned, saying "It was a very sad day. A day that I felt my career was coming to an end — everything I worked for."

Stack said he had nothing to do with Lopez's reassignment, saying it was Everett's decision. He also said the change from detective to patrolman cost Lopez just \$500 a year in salary.

Everett said Lopez's reassignment was part of a number of changes he made to reflect his vision as new chief, and such reassignments happen whenever a new chief is appointed.



ELIZABETH SWEENEY, left, and Steve Mumford look at a photograph of Steve Mumford, who was seriously burned Thursday morning.

Smoker using

By **CARLY BALDWIN**
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Steve Mumford woke up to his wife's screams of "Help me, help me!" early yesterday morning.

When he looked into the kitchen of their Duncan Avenue home, he saw his 55-

Radio tower