

# Contra Costa Times

Saturday, February 9, 1991

California's Best Large Daily — California Newspaper Publishers Association 19

## Discrimination award record \$1.25 million

By Michael Hytha  
Staff writer

MARTINEZ — A jury has awarded \$1.25 million to a Hercules man in what may be the largest verdict in Contra Costa County history against a company for wrongfully firing an employee.

The Contra Costa County Superior Court jury ruled that Unitank Corp. fired Frank Tetzschner as superintendent of the liquid storage facility near the Richmond Harbor in 1988 because of his age, 59.

Tetzschner claimed he was moved to a position without responsibility so a three-man management team, each in his early 30s, could replace him. Four days later, the company fired him, said Tetzschner's attorney, Jonathan Siegel.

On Feb. 1, the jury awarded Tetzschner \$495,529 for lost wages and emotional distress and, on Thursday, \$750,000 in punitive damages.

The total appears to be the

largest on record for an employment discrimination case in Contra Costa County, Siegel said.

He said another employee, also 59 at the time, had been fired under similar circumstances three years before Tetzschner.

The company said it fired Tetzschner for not reporting an incident in which a delivery line was connected to the wrong storage tank, Siegel said. But Tetzschner's supervisor testified that Tetzschner, employed at the facility 26 years, was the one who reported the mistake.

Unitank may appeal the decision, said Garth Black, its attorney. Unitank sold the tank farm to GATX Corp. last year.

Black said Tetzschner did not disclose the mistake involving the delivery hookup soon enough. The incident involving another employee three years before was an entirely separate matter, Black said, declining further comment.