

Deputy settles suit, goes back to work

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By Dave Hennigan

STAFF WRITER

A Greenville County sheriff's deputy fired in 1991 for conduct unbecoming an officer has settled a race discrimination lawsuit with the Sheriff's Office and is going back to work for the sheriff.

Patrick H. Cromer, who was a lieutenant and the highest ranking black deputy when he was fired, will return to the department Monday as a white collar crimes investigator with the rank of master deputy.

Neither Sheriff Johnny Mack Brown nor Cromer's attorney, Stephen Henry, would comment on the terms of the settlement.

"At this point everybody is on a positive note and the idea is for Pat to continue now with his law enforcement career. He's going to pick up from here," Henry said.

Cromer, a 17-year veteran of the department, will have to go through eight weeks of law enforcement certification training at the law enforcement academy in Columbia be-

cause he's been out of law enforcement for more than three years, Brown said.

Cromer was fired in June 1991. Brown has said it was for conduct unbecoming an officer. Cromer has said it was related to "racial problems" within the office.

Before he was fired, Cromer joined a black officers' association and spoke up about perceived racial discrimination in the Sheriff's Office.

Cromer's lawsuit claiming his dismissal was racially motivated and violated his First Amendment right of free speech was thrown out in March 1994.

However last July, a federal appeals court said Cromer deserved to have a trial on the allegation that he was fired because of his race.

The court also ruled deputies have the right to speak publicly about race discrimination in the sheriff's office.

■ Staff writer Dave Hennigan covers crime and law enforcement issues in Greenville County. He can be reached at 298-4801.