Owner of gunfight car, 81, gets $14,000

By FRANK MICKADEIT
2012-05-14 17:59:40

Every now and then you actually fix something. In February, Ken Carrier, 81, told me the following story:

About 9 a.m. on Dec. 13, he had been doing nothing more than trying to park at a Lake Forest Jack-in-the-Box when a man in plain clothes, waving a pistol and claiming to be a police officer, took his car in order to chase a robber.

Carrier felt he had no choice but to give up his 2006 Suzuki SUV, which the "officer" hopped in and floored down Rockfield in pursuit. Next time Carrier saw his vehicle it was a wreck. The "police officer," actually a private security guard for an AT&T store, had hit another vehicle.

The security firm offered to pay some damages – the value of the SUV, some rental car fees. It was all very nonspecific, Carrier said, and they kept stringing him along. Plus he was incurring storage costs on his wrecked SUV, and he realized what he really needed to make him whole was the actual replacement cost. He was going to be out of pocket several thousand dollars more than the security company was willing to cough up.

Plus, there was just the hassle of it all – why should he have to deal with this when it was a rogue security guard who was responsible?

The security company lawyer told me to give him a fair estimate. I did something better. I asked attorney Ed Susolik if he'd represent Carrier for free. Let's just say that his firm, Callahan & Blaine, has done pretty well by the Register of late.

It took Susolik one letter and one phone call. He outlined a case for negligence, conversion, financial elder abuse, infliction of emotional distress and fraud. He admits he got a little angry at the other lawyer. "I said, 'You should have paid him that day and given him a reward for helping you. Why are you making this man go through all these things?'"

Cha-ching: $14,000 settlement.

Here's how numbers look now: Carrier's insurer gave him $12,300, so he has a total of $26,300 for his losses. Subtracting the deductible, the rental car and the storage fee leaves him with $18,860. He just bought a new Honda CRV. He will take on a little debt he wouldn't have otherwise, but it's a better vehicle and it's a manageable monthly payment.

"I'm very happy," he says.

Carrier took Susolik and me to dine at the Capitol Grill on Monday. Susolik, who donated $4,259.06 of the firm's resources, had a sirloin steak salad and asparagus. I had the chicken-caesar. Carrier had a filet mignon and a martini his wife isn't supposed to know about.

Susolik then pushed the settlement agreement across the white linen tablecloth and Carrier signed with a flourish. Then we all walked out to the parking lot to take a look at his new ride, eyes out for security.