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Four file suit against Belo

WACO, Texas (AP) — A district attorney, two assistants and a Waco lawyer are suing the parent company of WFAA-TV in Dallas, alleging a series of televised news reports were false and misleading.

The four lawsuits are in response to a series of reports aired by WFAA-TV in June 1985 that alleged improprieties in McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell's handling of driving while intoxicated and drug possession cases in McLennan County.

The 11-part series was prepared by reporter Charles Duncan, who is named as a defendant in all four suits.

"I have no comment on the suit," said Marty Haag, WFAA-TV news director. "I haven't seen the suit yet. Of course we still stand by (Duncan's) reports. I have no comment other than what I just said."

Tom Leatherbury, a Dallas attorney representing A.H. Belo Corp., which owns WFAA-TV in Dallas, said Thursday, "We have no comment, since we have not seen the papers."

The plaintiffs are J. Patrick Murphy, an assistant McLennan County district attorney; John Ben Sutter, an administrative assistant; George Shaffer, a Waco attorney; and Feazell.

Murphy, Feazell and Sutter are represented by attorney Gary Richardson of Tulsa, Okla. Richardson said Murphy and Sutter are asking \$3 million each in damages and Feazell is asking for \$34.6 million.

"The substance (of the suits) are the malicious and totally erroneous — I guess you call them editorials — that were placed on television by (WFAA-TV)," Richardson said.

Shaffer, who is representing himself, said he sued over what he termed an irresponsible broadcast. He alleges he was not given the opportunity to respond to the broadcasts and is seeking \$3 million in damages.

The petitions were filed before State District Judge Bill Logue.

Feazell said he filed his suit last Friday because there is a one-year statute of limitations on libel suits. He declined further comment through an administrative assistant.

Feazell, 34, is seeking his second term as district attorney. He has won the Democratic nomination and faces Republican Paul Gartner in the November general election.