

Jury rules disputed handshake was not an

Defendant pleaded despite racking up more than \$20,000 in legal bills on case

By Pamela Powers
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Amy La Pean is saddled with thousands of dollars in legal bills, but she's still relieved an Eau Claire County jury decided Thursday her handshake was not an assault on fellow rural Menomonie resident Karin Worthley.

"I'm just glad it's over," La Pean

said.

Her husband, Greg La Pean, expressed a similar sentiment.

"It renews your faith in the legal system," he said, noting the couple had incurred more than \$20,000 in legal bills before the two-day jury trial.

Worthley filed a civil lawsuit in 1998 against Amy La Pean, saying

■ "Handshake" trial never should have been pursued. Page 1B.

La Pean gave her a hard handshake at a meeting in July 1998 about the use of Indian logos. Worthley opposed the use of the logo at Menomonie High School; Amy La Pean favored keeping it.

"I know I was injured by her," Worthley said. "I told the truth, and they didn't believe us. Two jurors did (though)."

Of the 12 jurors, two dissented. Under civil law, only 10 have to agree for a verdict. The jury deliberated about two hours.

La Pean's lawyer, Michael Wagner of Menomonie, said the jury did the right thing.

"This was a handshake, not an assault and battery," he said. "Of course I'm pleased. It was very stressful to represent people you believe are being wrongfully accused of something. It would have broke my heart if the jury had

gone the other way."

Worthley's lawyer, Phil Steans of Menomonie, said the jury's pondering of the issue for two hours meant they took it seriously.

"One of the arguments made was it was a silly lawsuit," Steans said. "I hope we never get to the point in our society just because an issue does not involve big amounts of dollars means it is not important."

During closing arguments Thursday, Steans said Worthley pursued the issue because she felt La