

Jury awards ex-DA Feazell record \$58 million in libel suit

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WACO — In the largest libel judgment in U.S. history, a jury Friday awarded \$58 million to former McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell, saying WFAA-TV defamed him in a 1985 series that accused him of taking payoffs in exchange for the dismissal of drunken-driving cases.

"I want to thank God. God led us, God preserved us, God gave us the victory," Feazell, 39, said at a victory party shortly after the verdict.

Feazell said the 11-part series in 1985 by the Dallas television station and reporter Charles Duncan ruined his reputation and led to an FBI investigation.

He was indicted in 1986 on federal racketeering charges but was acquitted in June 1987. He resigned in September 1988 to go into pri-

vate practice as a lawyer in Waco.

"This whole thing was an orchestrated retaliation against me for exposing the Henry Lee Lucas confession hoax," Feazell said Friday.

He has contended for years that state and federal officials harassed him after he launched a grand jury probe into the one-eyed drifter's confessions — later recanted — to hundreds of murders.



Mike McCarthy, senior vice president and general counsel of A.H. Belo Corp., which owns WFAA, said the verdict will be challenged.

FEAZELL "The company believes there is absolutely no factual basis to support this

jury verdict, which involves a public official. We will obviously pursue all available post-trial motions and, if necessary, appeal," McCarthy said.

Feazell and his attorney, Gary Richardson, said they are confident the jury's judgment will stand.

"There's no reversible error in this case. We tried a very conservative case. If there was ever any question, we backed down on it," Feazell said.

Before Friday's \$58 million award was announced, the largest previous libel judgments reported were \$34 million that a jury awarded Philadelphia lawyer Richard Sprague last May over a 1973 story in the Philadelphia Inquirer that criticized his handling of a homicide case when he was an assistant district attorney.