

Town retirees sue Irondequoit

BY STAFF WRITER

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IRONDEQUOIT — A group of town retirees has filed a lawsuit against the town over upcoming changes to their health insurance benefits.

The suit, filed yesterday in the Western District of U.S. District Court, asks the court to halt the changes and to order unspecified amounts in compensatory and punitive damages.

The retirees allege that the town breached agreements with its nonunion retirees when the Town Board voted March 20 to shift retirees' health care cover-

age from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to Blue Million plan to Blue Choice Senior.

The suit also alleges that the changes amount to age discrimination because the changes are broken down by age group.

Town Supervisor David Schantz and Town Attorney Stacey Romero both said they could not comment on pending litigation.

"The biggest difference is in the prescription coverage," said Amelia Fontana, one of four employees named in the suit, along with Hubert C. Lawrence, Roger R. Fox and John A. Magin.

Fontana, a town bookkeeper

starting in 1955, retired in 1991 at age 63.

Mechanic and shop foreman Roger R. Fox worked for the town from 1959 until his 1990 retirement at age 56. He has had three heart bypass surgeries since 1976 and estimates the full cost of his annual prescription drugs at around \$3,000.

Fox currently pays \$7 per 30-day supply for each of his four prescriptions. Under the new plan, he could pay as much as \$2,000 for the same pills.

"They're offering us a plan that is nowhere near our original plan," he said. "This is what was given to us and it shouldn't be

taken away 10 years later."

Under the town's new policy, retirees age 64 and younger will receive Blue Choice Select, those age 65 to 80 will get Blue Choice Senior, and those over 80 will retain their current coverage.

Retirees would be able to continue with Blue Million if they pick up the \$90 difference in monthly premiums.

Former Supervisor Donald Deming was in office when the town adopted the previous three health plan policy. "Our intent at the time was that we would provide the Blue Million plan for our employees and if

they qualified for retirement, we would continue to pay their health care coverage the same as it was when they were an employee with no changes and no reductions," he said. Deming receives his health care coverage through General Motors.

The retirees' attorney, J. Nelson Thomas of Dolin, Thomas and Solomon, said the town had promised his clients that their benefits would not be reduced or taken away.

"These people retired when they did based on the assumption that their health coverage would remain the same," he said. □