

Longtime temp workers sue city

By PHUONG CAT LE, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER Published 10:00 pm, Thursday, October 10, 2002

Three city of Seattle employees yesterday filed a lawsuit challenging the city's practice of hiring temporary employees while keeping them on a long-term basis without paying them benefits, such as vacation time and sick leave.

Larry Glaser, Scott Roberts and Kenneth Williams, who all worked full time for the city for more than four years, brought the potential class-action lawsuit against the city in King County Superior Court.

Because they were "temporary" contract workers, the men said, they didn't receive the same health benefits, holiday pay or vacation time that other permanent employees got -- despite working more hours than some of their co-workers.

"I feel I've been treated as a second-class citizen," said Glaser, 38, who has worked as a technician at the West Seattle Golf Course since 1996.

The City Attorney's Office declined to comment yesterday, saying the case is an ongoing lawsuit.

The workers are represented by Bendich, Stobaugh and Strong, a Seattle law firm that has won large settlements in similar "permatemps" cases against Microsoft, Bellevue, King County and Seattle.

At a news conference yesterday, attorney Judith Bendich said she will seek to make the lawsuit a class action. She said more than 100 city employees are being mislabeled as "temps," even though they work full time and many for more than two years.

Bendich said the city is violating a 1989 class-action settlement that allowed it to use temporary employees but not for ongoing full-time work.

Glaser was hired in 1996 as a temporary employee for the **Seattle Parks and Recreation Department** and began working full time in 1998. Over the years, he worked as a golf course technician, running the irrigation system at the West Seattle Golf Course.

While he received training and was sent to professional conferences, he said he never moved beyond temporary work status and so didn't qualify for health, vision or dental care.

Temporary city employees must pay for their own health insurance, and Glaser said he couldn't afford the \$454-a-month payments.

Glaser said he stayed in the job because he enjoyed the work and felt his skills were well-used. But he sued the city because he said he wants fair treatment.

His colleague in the Parks Department, Roberts, shares his sentiment.

Despite clocking more than 10,250 work hours with the city over four years, Roberts said he didn't receive paid sick, holiday or vacation leave like permanent employees.

Roberts and Glaser were notified last week that they would lose their jobs at the end of this month because of the city's budget cuts.

"I want the wrong corrected," said Williams, who has worked for the city for more than eight years, both in the Mayor's Office of Senior Citizens and Seattle Public Utilities.

Despite winning an award for employee safety, Williams said he was denied the \$50 prize money because he wasn't a permanent city worker.