

Caltrans to Pay \$8 Million in Settlement With RV Dealer

By Jennifer McLain
Staff Writer

Three years after Caltrans offered Altmans Winnebago nearly \$1 million for its land, the agency ended up paying nearly \$8 million.

The payment was part of settlement agreement, reached on June 8, between Altmans and Caltrans. Caltrans will use Altmans property at 12911 Garvey Ave. to widen the 10 Freeway.

"We are very happy that we finally got them to see our point of view," said owner Joe Altman. "Now, we can concentrate on selling RVs."

Caltrans Spokeswoman Judy Gish said she could not discuss the details of the settlement agreement because it is not yet finalized.

The agreement was signed by Caltrans attorney Erick Solares on June 8, and is scheduled to be complete in the next two weeks, records show. Solares did not return calls for comment.

"We can't comment except for that we are working with them to resolve the issues," Gish said.

Altmans Winnebago has been a fixture along the 10 Freeway in Baldwin Park since 1971. The one-time corporate headquarters will be demolished along with several other businesses and homes for a freeway widening project. Work in the area began in April.

Although Caltrans notified Altmans in 2002 that it would take the land, no action was taken until 2006, according to court records.



The Altman family from left: manager Steve Altman, owner Marla Altman and president Joe Altman of Altmans Winnebago are suing CalTrans over compensation for the property the state took to make freeway improvements in Baldwin Park April 21, 2009. Joe and Marla are brother and sister while Steve is Marla's son. (SGVN/Staff photo by Leo Jarzomb)

In 2006, it made its first offer, at \$953,000, to buy portions of the property.

After Caltrans officially seized Altmans through eminent domain proceedings in 2007, it upped its offer to \$3.86 million - but that offer was only good for the cost of the property and did not include any payment for loss of business Altmans would see.

Altmans employs 167 people at its stores in Carson and Colton, and generated more than \$61 million last year.

Bruce Cooper, a former owner of an RV dealership who was prepared to speak as an expert witness on behalf on Altmans, said the timeframe used by Caltrans to assess the value of the company was incomplete.

"The industry fell off the cliff after October 2008, just as the car business and everything else did," Cooper said. "But the appraisal only focused on the months after October."

Believing the terms unfair, Altmans asked for a jury trial, which was scheduled to begin May 5 in Los Angeles Superior Court.

With just one week before the trial, Caltrans made its settlement offer. The proposed judgement was signed on June 8.

"This is not a jury verdict," Murphy said. "This is Caltrans stepping up and realizing the value that the Altmans family had created at the site in Baldwin park."