

Suits

Video companies escalate dispute

A legal dispute between onetime friends who head two Broward TV production companies is escalating.

The dispute began earlier this year when Jack A. Levine sued his former employer over stock payments. Levine is seeking payment for his 20 percent interest in Visionary Studios Inc., the parent company of Bookstone Production Co., where he used to work. He is asking that Visionary honor its obligation to buy back the stock from him at fair market price.

Visionary counterclaimed, seeking a judgment that Levine must forfeit all his stock.

Bookstone then sued as well, alleging that a group of former insiders, including Levine and Tricom president Mark Alfieri, stole video tapes of its shows and used them to start rival Tricom Pictures and Productions Inc., where Levine is now vice president.

Levine, represented by Boca Raton solo practitioner Steven Warm, has denied the allegations against him and now has added a new batch of his own allegations to the contentious litigation.

"We deny all these additional allegations," said Brookstone's lawyer, Kenneth W. Lipman of Boca Raton,



Tricom Pictures and Productions Inc. vice president Jack A. Levine, left, and president Mark Alfieri are feuding with their former employer, Visionary Studios Inc.

who wouldn't discuss specifics of the case. "We will let a court of law determine the merit of them."

In his counterclaim, Levine says his former friend, Brookstone president Marc Minkoff, defamed him in at least two letters. The letters, according to the suit, state that Levine had taken money on false pretenses, had engaged in potentially criminal activity when starting his own company, had lured

away Bookstone employees and had stolen "valuable items." The letters were sent to a television airtime broker.

The truth, the suit states, was that

Levine was dissatisfied with Brookstone and that he was within his rights to form Tricom. Other disgruntled employees naturally gravitated to his new company and Levine did not lure them, the suit states. It also denies he ever took money.

Minkoff was fully aware that he might leave at some point, Levine said. The two had an agreement that if Levine left, Minkoff would repurchase his stock at fair market value, Levine said.

Levine also denies stealing the tapes, saying that he had a right to possess them.

"I didn't steal it," Levine said. "I owned 20 percent of the company. I produced it and directed it and wrote it. I have half-inch copies that were given out to companies as promotional materials to show the quality of our work. I have no originals."

In his supplemental complaint, Levine outlines a series of events or transactions in which Minkoff played a role that were done allegedly to dilute the value of the company in which he had a 20 percent ownership interest and to wrongfully appropriate assets. ■

— Mary Hladky