

LA Jury Awards \$5M In Fees In Katy Perry Convent Trial

By **Melissa Daniels**

Law360, Los Angeles (November 17, 2017, 10:11 PM EST) -- A Los Angeles jury on Friday awarded nearly \$3.5 million in legal fees to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and about \$1.57 million to pop star Katy Perry after a trial over whether a developer intentionally interfered with Perry's \$14.5 million bid to buy a sprawling former convent by entering her own deal to buy the property from two nuns.



The jury found in favor of the archdiocese, an associated entity and Katy Perry on a slander of title claim, an intentional interference with contractual relations claim and a prospective interference with economic damages claim. Above, the gate to the convent. (AP)

The verdict came down after a day of deliberations in the 2 1/2-year legal battle between defendant Dana Hollister and the church, which had planned to sell the 25-room mansion to Perry. Hollister had entered her own agreement to purchase the property and recorded a grant deed before Perry's purchase could be completed, clouding the title and sending all parties to court.

The jury found in favor of the archdiocese, an associated entity and Perry on a slander of title claim, an intentional interference with contractual relations claim and a prospective interference with economic damages claim. The fees awarded to Perry were around \$1 million less than she had requested.

Hollister's attorney Michael A. Geibelson of Robins Kaplan LLP told Law360 that while disappointed in the verdict, he respects the work of the jury. He also cited several pieces of evidence and certain witnesses that weren't allowed to be presented at trial — such as evidence about proceedings at the Vatican and an expert witness on attorneys' fees.

"Their work is difficult," he said of the jury, "especially with only half the record and half the evidence."

A representative for Perry and the archdiocese didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on Friday.

When polled, the jury delivered a mix bag, with one juror disagreeing with the findings on all claims

and other jurors disagreeing with the verdict on selective claims.

The jury also found that Hollister had acted with malice against the church and Perry. Punitive damages will be decided at a second phase of the trial, scheduled for Dec. 1.

The trial spanned nine days from openings to closings, and the verdict was returned after 5 1/2 hours of deliberations. The proceedings brought together top litigators from McKool Smith Hennigan PC, representing the church; Greenberg Traurig LLP, representing Perry's business entity The Bird Nest LLC; and Robins Kaplan LLP, representing Hollister.

The convent, a sprawling property in the hills of Los Angeles' Los Feliz neighborhood, is the former home of the California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a religious nonprofit whose membership is down to five sisters. Built in 1930, it encompasses 25 bedrooms and 29 bathrooms across about 19,000 square feet. Sitting just south of Los Angeles' Griffith Park, on Waverly Drive, the property also includes another large home used as a priests' retreat.

When two of the nuns — Sister Rita Callanan and Sister Catherine Rose Holzman — heard of the archbishop's plan to sell the property to the pop singer for \$14.5 million, they made a deal to sell the convent to Hollister, a developer and restaurant owner, for \$10 million, according to court records. She paid \$100,000, of which \$56,000 went to transfer taxes, according to court records, and issued a promissory note for the rest.

The archdiocese filed suit in June 2015 to block the Hollister sale, and Perry filed a cross-complaint three months later, asserting she had a contract in place giving her the "exclusive right" to buy the convent.

A ruling on a motion for summary judgment determined that the convent, dubbed the Waverly property, is an asset of the institute, which is controlled by the church.

The trial focused on the archbishop's and the institute's claims that Hollister improperly recorded the grant deed against the property and interfered with the church's plans to sell the property to The Bird Nest. The archdiocese sought about \$3.5 million in attorneys' fees and costs.

As cross-complainant, The Bird Nest said it entered a valid transaction with the institute and has the written approval of the archbishop to buy the property, and sought its own fees and costs of about \$2.6 million.

Attorneys for the church and The Bird Nest argued that Hollister knew she needed approval from the archdiocese and the Vatican in order to make her transaction valid — approvals that she didn't have when she recorded the deed, they said.

Hollister's counsel denied any intentional interference during the course of the proceedings, saying that she had relied on the nuns and their counsel in ensuring that her purchase was legitimate. As a result, Hollister wound up getting caught in a long-running dispute between the two sisters and the archdiocese, her counsel said.

Perry, whose real name is Katheryn Hudson, did not testify. Her proposal to purchase the Waverly property also requires her to find a replacement property for the priests' retreat.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles and the California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary are represented by J. Michael Hennigan, Kirk D. Dillman, Robert J. King and Robert W. Mockler of McKool Smith Hennigan PC.

The Bird Nest LLC is represented by Eric Rowen, Michael Starler and Lisa McCurdy of Greenberg Traurig LLP.

Hollister is represented by Michael A. Geibelson and Daniel L. Allender of Robins Kaplan LLP, Randy S. Snyder of the Law Offices of Randy S. Snyder and Frederick R. Juckniess of Juckniess Law Firm PLC.

The suit is Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles et al. v. Dana Hollister, case number BC585604, in the Superior Court of the State of California, County of Los Angeles.

--Additional reporting by Daniel Siegal. Editing by Catherine Sum.